PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 131

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
THIRTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1987-88

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12 April 1988

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

THIRTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 131**

FOURTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1987-88

House of Commons

Tuesday 12 April 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SERVICES

Sickle Cell Anaemia

1. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has made any assessment of the cost effectiveness of screening at birth for sickle cell anaemia.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mrs. Edwina Currie): Studies in the USA and in this country suggest that while screening all babies for sickle cell anaemia would not be cost effective, it is valuable to screen babies from certain groups with high risk. That is now being done in a large number of health authorities, including Manchester.

Mr. Lloyd: Will the Minister confirm that in the cases of hyperthyroidism and phenylketonuria, whose incidence is only one in 10,000 of the population, screening is automatic at birth, but that for sickle cell anaemia, which occurs as often as one in 400 among affected groups, no such provision exists? The Minister tells the House that screening exists in some places, but the service is patchy and inadequate and many black people take the view that if this disease were suffered by white people screening would be automatic. I share their view that this is an example of colour blindness within the National Health Service.

Mrs. Currie: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the report in the *British Medical Journal* of 15 March 1986, which, having examined the pattern of screening in, for example, the Camberwell health authority, clearly stated that it would not be worth while doing it for all babies, but that it would be for babies that might be at risk.

Ms. Harman: Is the Minister not concerned that, while more babies are being born, maternity beds are being cut; that a low birth-weight baby has less chance of getting into a special-care baby cot today than five years ago; and that women's choice on where to have their babies is being restricted by the closure of smaller maternity units? Will she reconvene the maternity services advisory committee——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Front Bench must stick to the question.

Ms. Harman: Will the Minister reconvene the maternity services advisory committee——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We must start this part of the Session in good order. The hon. Lady must bring her question to an end now.

Mrs. Currie: As you rightly point out, Mr. Speaker, that question has little to do with screening for sickle cell anaemia. However, I refer the hon. Lady to the discussion that we had on the same issue in response to one of her hon. Friends, back in October, when I pointed out that, on average in this country, one baby is born per maternity bed per week, which does not suggest overcrowding or lack of resources.

Disabled People (Assistance)

2. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services by what criteria applications for assistance from the special fund to help the severely disabled are to be judged; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Social Security and the Disabled (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I announced the eligibility criteria for the

independent living fund in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) on 31 March. The fund will be primarily to make payments to very severely disabled people on low income who receive attendance allowance and need to employ domestic help to enable them to live independently in the community.

Dr. Moonie: How does the Minister reconcile his treatment of severely disabled people with the treatment of slightly less severely disabled people under the new provisions?

Mr. Scott: We have set out to ensure that this group, whose needs were drawn to our attention by a number of organisations and who need this extra help to sustain their independent lives in the community, should have the advantages of this flexible system administered by an independent trust.

Mr. Burns: Will my hon. Friend confirm that existing disabled recipients of supplementary benefit will enjoy a transitional scheme that will ensure that their benefits are in no way cut to a value less than they now enjoy?

Mr. Scott: Of course, they will enjoy cash transitional protection, but those who have domestic care assistance in excess of £10 a week will have protection in real terms; so they have been more generously treated than anyone else at the transitional point.

Mr. Fearn: Will the Minister confirm that applications from severely disabled people will go through the normal DHSS channels, and that the budgets for DHSS offices, which are now quite meagre, will be able to cope with this extra burden; or is the new special fund over and above that? If DHSS offices run out of money, severely disabled people will probably suffer.

Mr. Scott: I am glad to be able to confirm that this is entirely new money and that it will be administered by the new trust which has been established, details of which I announced on 31 March.

Mr. Baldry: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the money received from this fund will be additional and will not simply be taken away from the other benefit entitlements of recipients?

Mr. Scott: Indeed, any payments under this fund will be disregarded for the purpose of income-related benefits.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Is it not a disgrace that a fund that is supposed to protect some of those who are among the worst hit by yesterday's social security changes has not yet been formally constituted? Who are the trustees? Why did the Minister refuse this House information on costs that his Department gave to the press that same afternoon? Will the extra heating costs and special diet needs of disabled people be met by the fund? Why should Conservative Members attack the Bishop of Durham for describing as wicked changes——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is well outside the scope of this question.

Mr. Morris: —in benefits, which will hit up to 500,000 disabled people?

Mr. Scott: Far from being a disgrace, the facilities of this fund for severely disabled people are a very important step in recognising their particular needs. It will be for the trustees to make the decisions in independent cases. *[Interruption.]* I do not think that there is a delay. We want to get the trust deed right and the trustees in place in order to get the answer right rather than to meet some artificial deadline. Applications can already be made to the DHSS if people wish to apply, and speedy decisions will be possible as soon as the trust is established.

Property Sales

3. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how much money was realised from the sale of properties surplus to National Health Service requirements in each year since 1979.

The Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. John Moore): In 1978-79 the National Health Service received £7·5 million from the sale of surplus property. By 1986-87 receipts had increased almost twentyfold to £146 million, and in the financial year just ended we expect them to be about £200 million. I will, with permission, circulate figures for each of the last 10 years in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Rowe: My right hon. Friend is to be congratulated on that excellent result. Is he aware that the present rules governing the disposal of such property militate sharply against any attempt by district health authorities to improve the asset before disposing of it? In his new review of the Health Service, will he undertake to look into that matter?

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend fairly acknowledged that the record is such as to suggest that we are succeeding in this area. I shall look at the point that he makes, because we all want the resources of the Health Service to be used for the best patient care.

Mr. David Martin: I hope that when disposing of property my right hon. Friend will take into account the importance of green space. In areas such as Portsmouth one hopes that the development that takes place will not be so dense that we lose all the traditional amount of green space that people have grown used to seeing in National Health Service properties.

Mr. Moore: I remind my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment issued guidelines last autumn which should enable appropriate development of disused hospital sites in the green belt without—I stress the point that my right hon. Friend made —prejudicing the Government's green belt policy.

Following is the information:

Proceeds of NHS land sales 1978/79 to 1987/88

Year	*£ million*
1978-79	7·5
1979-80	10·0
1980-81	15·4
1981-82	19·4
1982-83	18·2
1983-84	31·5
1984-85	48·9
1985-86	82·9
1986-87	146·0

The figure for 1987-88 is not available but is expected to be of the order of £200 million.

Disabled People (Assistance)

4. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects the special fund set up to help the severely disabled to be in operation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Applications to the fund can be made now by writing to the Department. As an interim measure, my officials, guided by professional advice, will carry out assessments so that when the trust is formally established decisions can be taken swiftly. Moreover, we shall look sympathetically at individual cases and, where appropriate, make interim payments in advance of the fund itself coming into operation.

Mr. McKay: The Minister's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) and the answer that he has just given me are not very satisfactory. Can he give a definite date on which people will receive payment from the fund? What publicity is being undertaken so that people will know when to make applications to the fund, and what arrangements are being made for the fund to be built up, taking into consideration that money in the fund will be running short? Will it help the Godden family, and has today's report in the *Daily Mirror* been brought to the Minister's attention? Will the fund help that family, and when?

Mr. Scott: Mrs. Godden has been contacted and advised to make an application to the fund. Obviously I cannot prejudge the outcome of any application that she might make, but it has been suggested to her that she can make an application. The hon. Gentleman asked about publicity. In due course we shall be running a campaign involving suitably placed posters and leaflets and so on. I am confident that the organisations concerned with the disabled, which publish regular magazines and news sheets, will carry details of the fund so that it may be widely known among those who might benefit from it. The hon. Gentleman should understand that existing beneficiaries will have transitional protection at the point of change. We are talking here about new people coming into the system. In those circumstances, I do not believe that a short delay should be unsettling or upsetting to those involved.

Mr. Favell: Will my hon. Friend take the opportunity this afternoon to condemn those who have been scaremongering among the disabled about the arrangements that are being made under the new social security provisions? Will he remind the House that this Administration, in contrast to previous Administrations, has been first-class in helping the disabled to take their place in the community?

Mr. Scott: I have considerable sympathy with my hon. Friend's point. It comes hard from Opposition Members to criticise us for the provision that we have made for the disabled, when we have increased provision for them by 80 per cent. in real terms during our period in government. Under these reforms, we are putting in another £60 million, and we have also established this fund. If anyone should criticise us, it should not be Opposition Members.

Mr. Ashley: Is the Minister aware that six charities, which do not go in for scaremongering, have described this fund as an abdication of the Government's responsibility? That is not scaremongering. Will he tell the House what advice he will give to severely disabled people when the money runs out?

Mr. Scott: We have allocated £5 million for the coming financial year and allocations for future years will be settled on the basis of our experience. As existing claimants will have transitional protection, I expect that the numbers will build up comparatively slowly in the coming year. I believe that the £5 million will be adequate to meet the needs, so there will be no question of the money running out.

I think that it is worth repeating to the right hon. Gentleman and to those who have criticised us that the overwhelming part of the provision for severely disabled people will continue to be through income support and the different premiums to which they are entitled. This is a small fund to meet the needs of a small group of people, for a comparatively short time, in a flexible and compassionate manner.

1991 Census

5. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to bring forward proposals for arrangements for the 1991 census.

16. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to bring forward proposals for arrangements for the 1991 census.

Mr. Moore: No decisions have yet been taken on the content of the 1991 census. Proposals will be published as a White Paper later this year.

Mr. Bennett: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that there will be the widest possible consultation about the questionnaire that will be sent out with the census? Will he assure the House that, as in previous censuses, all the information given will be kept confidential?

Mr. Moore: I can certainly confirm that there will be consultation, and I remind the House that it is an offence under the Census Act 1920 for information on individuals to be released for use other than for census purposes. That includes the community charge.

Mr. Bowis: Will my right hon. Friend pay attention to the need for information on the elderly, particularly the very elderly, so that the opportunities presented by increasing longevity can be met by the old people themselves and by the local health authorities that will be seeking to plan for them?

Mr. Moore: Yes. At the moment we are considering all requests relating to information to be put in the census. I do not want to make any particular comment at this time, but we shall be publishing the White Paper later this year.

Mr. Beith: Will the Minister consider the suggestion that we made at the time of the 1981 census: that the legal requirement to answer questions should be restricted to a very small number of questions, rather than to pose people with the threat of criminal sanctions merely because they do not want to say where their father was born or provide an answer that is not essential for the Government's purposes?

Mr. Moore: I shall certainly consider that point, as I have personal experience of that matter. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point.

Ms. Richardson: In connection with the census, bearing in mind that more and more women are being forced into unpaid work, such as caring for elderly and dependent relatives, and as the voluntary sector is becoming increasingly important because of the failure to provide essential public and consumer services, will the Minister respond to the pressure from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, following the forward-looking

strategies after the United Nations Decade of Women, and ensure that the 1991 census form includes provision for voluntary as well as paid work to be counted?

Mr. Moore: I do not accept the first part of the hon. Lady's statement, but I will certainly look with great care at her latter points.

Mr. Chapman: Will my right hon. Friend give some sign in the White Paper of the likely time when the evaluation of the census results will be made known to the public? Will he try to ensure in this computer age that the results will be available in weeks rather than the apparent years that it normally takes, during which time most of the information becomes out of date?

Mr. Moore: I shall want to consider that when we discuss the White Paper later this year. The details are not yet settled, but I would expect preliminary reports on the size of the population, about which I know my hon. Friend is interested, to be published as soon as possible after census day. Key results will be available to local authorities by May 1992, and I hope that the first national reports will be published before the end of 1992.

Family Income Supplement

8. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the take up rate for family income supplement in Orkney and Shetland.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Michael Portillo): Information about take-up rates is available only on a national basis.

Mr. Wallace: I know the Minister is aware that farmers and crofters in my constituency, who have been claiming family income supplement and now wish to claim family credit, have been asked to fill in a form giving consent for the district valuer to value their crofts and smallholdings. What advice can the Minister offer to them if the value of those holdings is so great as to disqualify them from family credit when they need that land to earn their small and modest incomes?

Mr. Portillo: I can offer the hon. Gentleman a pretty good reassurance on this. The value of a person's home is completely disregarded in the assessment of capital for family credit. The regulations are quite specific in saying that any croft land on which the dwelling is situated is also to be disregarded. Therefore, the value of any croft land should not be in question. If the hon. Gentleman finds in due course that there is a problem, perhaps he will get in touch with me about it.

Mr. Thurnham: As a result of the Government's excellent reforms, will not more children in low-income families in Orkney and elsewhere receive cash for their school meals rather than free meals under the present family income supplement system?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Taking account of family income supplement and local authority discretionary schemes, we estimate that 100,000 more children will receive the cash aid than presently qualify for free school meals.

Social Security Rreform

9. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the efforts made by his Department to publicise the changes in the social security system in April.

Mr. Moore: My Department has organised television and press advertising campaigns. Our leaflets have been redesigned and rewritten to make them more attractive and easier to understand. Our regional and local staff are taking the initiative on local publicity and information. Special fact sheets have been produced for organisations representing and advising claimants to help them understand and explain the reforms, and claimants themselves will receive information about the changes, with notifications about the new benefit.

Mr. Hughes: Does the Secretary of State accept that, in spite of all that publicity, he has not managed to persuade the majority of people that his changes are acceptable? Does he accept that a system which allows a mother aged under 18 with a child to receive £14 a week less than a mother aged over 18, which allows an old person with a disability to receive over £20 a week less, or which means that people who have been encouraged to save and have saved £6,000 cannot receive any benefit is not the kind of system that the Government can convince the country is worth continuing? When will the results of the publicity, which has not persuaded 62 per cent. of the Minister's Back Benchers that it is acceptable, prove that the system needs to be changed before substantial disadvantage is caused to millions of people in Britain?

Mr. Moore: The publicity was addressed to the claimants, and it will continue to be so, in an attempt to communicate and help them to ensure that they receive the benefits to which they are entitled. The purpose of the publicity is not to publicise the benefits of the nature of the structural reforms. The structural reforms will be welcomed and accepted by the vast majority of people.

Mr. Alexander: Is it not also important to counter the pernicious propaganda of some Opposition Members, particularly on school meals? Would one ever learn from their pronouncements that a different system operates and that significantly more pupils will benefit?

Mr. Moore: Absolutely. I remind the House that 800,000 children—*[Interruption.]* Facts are always much more difficult to accept, especially for some of those hon. Members who interrupt from a sedentary position. I repeat that 800,000 children will continue to receive school meals through local authorities and 100,000 more children will benefit from family credit than was the case under FIS and local authority discretionary schemes.

Mr. Dobson: Guesswork.

Mr. Moore: Not guesswork, Mr. Speaker. That is based on national data normally accepted by those who are serious about the matter as opposed to those, such as the shadow Leader of the House, who are concerned only with making sedentary interruptions.

Ms. Mowlam: If the Minister is interested in helping families by the introduction of family credit, as he tells us he is, why was child benefit frozen? What he is giving with one hand, he is taking away with the other.

Mr. Moore: As my right hon. and hon. Friends have explained at considerable length in a considerable number of debates, we have sought to give additional help to 3

million children, out of the 12 million children who are in receipt of child benefit, through an increase in income support and family credit which they would otherwise not receive. They will benefit particularly from the reforms.

Mr. Ralph Howell: As child benefit is more valuable to better-off parents than to others, why have we not made child benefit means-tested in order to save £3 billion?

Mr. Moore: With his extensive knowledge of this subject, my hon. Friend draws attention to the tax position of the more wealthy families in receipt of child benefit as opposed to those in receipt of income support and family credit.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: In the light of what the Secretary of State has said about unpalatable facts, does he accept that many elderly and low-paid people are shocked at the reduction in their incomes as a result of the social security and housing benefit changes? Will he give a commitment that his Department will review the existing system when he has been inundated with facts from Back Benchers on the effect of the changes on their constituents?

Mr. Moore: I am conscious of the fact that 87 per cent. of pensioners benefit from or are no worse off as a result of the changes. I am also conscious of the Government's outstanding record in improving the lot of the pensioner, especially in destroying that which most threatens the pensioner—the appalling rates of inflation that the Government inherited from the previous Labour Government.

Mr. Marlow: Would it be helpful to the public during the debate to make plain the vast amount of resources involved—I think that the social security budget is about £800 for every man, woman and child in Britain, which is about £64 a week for every family of four—and that, however little or much anybody might be receiving through supplementary benefit, that money is coming from their neighbours?

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend is right. An extraordinary feature of the debate is that it is hard for those outside to realise that during the past eight and a half years expenditure on social security has increased—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is unseemly to shout from a sedentary position.

Mr. Moore: —in real terms by 38 per cent. Most of that has little to do with the increased number of those unemployed and everything to do with the enormous increase in benefits for pensioners, the disabled and families with children.

Mr. Robin Cook: Can the Secretary of State name a single organisation representing claimants which has been convinced by the Government's claim that 87 per cent. will be no worse off as a result of the changes? Is he aware that not one of my colleagues who met desperate claimants at their surgeries at the weekend can accept his complacent figures, that his own Social Security Advisory Committee put the losers as a majority, and that even Conservative-controlled Wandsworth council estimates that there will be twice as many losers as gainers in its borough? Has he forgotten—we have not—that last month his Government found £2,000 million for the top taxpayers? With all that cash to spare, is it not abundantly clear that they had the money to prevent there being any losers among the poor?

Mr. Moore: The hon. Gentleman is aware—as is anyone who looks at the facts—of the invalidity of most of the data in studies such as that of Wandsworth, which assumed, for example, that all income supports claimants in this country were in receipt of single payments as of the middle of 1986. Two thirds of them were not. The hon. Gentleman also asks whether any group in the country actually supports the Government's proposals. The proposals were published and printed. They were passed by this House in 1986 and confirmed by the election in 1987.

Mr. Wells: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, unfortunately, his efforts in publishing these changes have not been drawn to the attention of the Bishop of Durham? Does he agree that it is indeed wicked for the Bishop of Durham to comment when he has not read and does not understand what the Government are doing to support the poorest people in this land?

Mr. Moore: I have the distinct feeling that you, Mr. Speaker, would not wish me to pursue that particular line of argument, other than to say that the reforms add to and do not diminish the overall expenditure by the taxpayer on social security help for the poorest people.

Social Security Reform

10. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claimants he expects to be better off and how many to be worse off *(a)* in cash terms, and *(b)* in terms of their real disposable income, following the changes in social security in April.

14. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claimants he expects to be better off *(a)* in cash terms, and *(b)* in terms of their real disposable income, following on the changes in social security in April.

Mr. Moore: Most social security benefits, including retirement pension paid to over 9 million pensioners, are uprated this week giving cash increases to recipients and protecting the real value of their benefit. So far as the income-related benefits are concerned, around 5·1 million recipients will gain and 2·2 million experience no change, compared with fewer than one million who lose in cash terms.

Dr. Godman: Listening to the ministerial recitations of those figures, I am reminded of a well-known book about statistics that was published in 1973—[HON. MEMBERS: "Question."]

May I ask the Minister, given the notorious inaccuracy of the statistics produced by his Department, and given that the arrangements for transitional protection are being made by local DHSS offices, to place in the Library a list containing the actual number of claimants who are to receive transitional protection? Is it the case that they are not to receive benefit uprating this year, and, by that fact, they are already losers and will continue to be losers for many years to come?

Mr. Moore: First, the data are from the family expenditure survey. As Opposition Members know, but seem to have discovered only recently, the data were printed in 1985 and again in October 1987 in absolute detail. All the data have been printed and published and were laid before the House when the uprating statement was issued in October 1987.

Mr. Ross: The House will be shocked by the complacent attitude of the Secretary of State. He will know that his own Social Security Advisory Committee, the Citizens Advice Bureaux—hardly a militant Socialist organisation—and the Church have all said that there will be far more losers than winners. What is he really going to do to help those losers when the information is available?

Mr. Moore: I thought that in his main question the hon. Gentleman was asking for facts and statistics as opposed to the opinions of other organisations. I am not suggesting for one moment that there are not people who criticise some aspects of the changes, though many of them tend to concentrate only on the negative aspects of the changes as opposed to the overall strategic thrust, which is beneficial.

Sir Peter Emery: Every hon. Member wants to ensure that the worst-off sections of society receive benefit, but there are some who have been thrifty all their lives, who have retired with some savings and who are now in difficulty because, with the rise in the cost of living, their savings have been depleted. Housing benefit brought them between £300 and £400 a year. Therefore, they believe that some of these measures are a disincentive to thrift. These people need further consideration.

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend is quite right to draw attention to the problems that are faced by any society which tries to encourage thrift and which also has to make a judgment about the level at which one cuts off benefit. Quite clearly, nobody would wish to discourage thrift. My hon. Friend knows that for the first time those with very small savings—up to £3,000—will not suffer any disadvantage. The line is drawn only for those with savings above £6,000. My hon. Friend also knows that people save because they seek independence. They do not save to achieve dependency. My hon. Friend will also be conscious of the fact that there are many millions of people on very low incomes with no savings at all who find no good reason to pay part of the rent or rates of those with substantial savings.

Mr. Sims: To put some of the Opposition's claims into perspective, will my right hon. Friend provide a little more detail about the extent of the increases? For example, how many of the so-called gainers are to enjoy £3 or more extra a week?

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend is right to remind the House of one of the points that is not often raised here. Of those who are to receive an increase, 40 per cent., or over 2 million, will be gaining an extra £3 or more a week.

Mr. Rowlands: The Secretary of State has argued that these changes are vital to the economy. What is so vital to the economy that requires a cut in rate rebate for a miner's widow of £1·69? Is she supposed to join the enterprise culture?

Mr. Moore: The overall changes increase public expenditure. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary drew attention to the fact that, because of the successful management of the economy, we are able to increase to £48·5 billion our social security expenditure in 1988-89.

Mr. Cormack: Can we, in 1988, really call £6,000 substantial savings?

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend asks a question that obviously many people will ask. I know he will understand that those who have to make such a decision have difficulty in drawing a line. He will also be very conscious of the millions of people who have no savings and who therefore see no reason why they, on very low incomes, should help to support those who save, I assume, to achieve independence, not dependency.

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the Secretary of State to the case raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay), that of Mrs. Felicity Godden who, whatever the outcome of an application to the independent living fund, from Monday lost £48 in social security, free school meals for three daughters and most of her housing benefit. Is the Secretary of State aware that there are 15,000 other disabled claimants who are losing similar amounts under the same rule? Are they all supposed to apply to the independent living fund? Can it cope with them? Is there any word that can more adequately describe their treatment by this Government than wicked?

Mr. Moore: It might be helpful, Mr. Speaker, to try to answer the question that has been raised, because I have been appalled by the attempt to make political capital out of what is clearly an exceptional and difficult case. It is for the independent adjudication authorities to determine how the regulations should apply, but I understand that Mrs. Godden continues to receive the wife's severe disablement benefit, attendance allowance, mobility allowance and child benefit—over £113 a week. Her husband's earnings, in addition, amount to £128 and she has free accommodation. In addition, I understand that she is being invited to put in a claim to the independent living fund, and that the local authority's social services department is investigating to see whether other assistance may be appropriate. Both the local authority and our social security officials have been trying to visit her. Unfortunately, they have not so far been able to see her because she has been away on holiday.

Disabled People (Assistance)

12. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether there will be any mechanism for the review of or appeal against a refusal of assistance from the special fund set up to help the severely disabled.

Mr. Scott: It will be for the trustees of the independent living fund to determine how to deal with cases which have been turned down. I am sure that they will wish to give very careful consideration to any cases which give rise to dissatisfaction.

Mr. Barnes: Should not an appeals procedure be established in connection with the fund? Hon. Members on both sides of the House realise the importance of appeal procedures relating to the DHSS, in appeals to bodies such as the Solicitors' Complaints Bureau. Many people, including my constituents, are in need of assistance, and we need the establishment of proper procedures. Assistance should be given to the Citizens' Advice Bureaux and bodies such as the Derbyshire Coalition for the Disabled in my constituency, and the Centre for Integrated Living at Ripley, to help those appealing for deeply needed payments.

Mr. Scott: I do not believe that a formal appeals procedure would be appropriate for a flexible system such as ours, administered by an independent fund. I am sure that the trustees will want to establish procedures so that they can take a second look at cases that cause dissatisfaction. I hope very much that the press release that

accompanied my announcement on 31 March will lead to wide publicity being given to those who will be advising the severely disabled about their entitlement.

Mr. Holt: Will my hon. Friend reconsider whether there should be an appeals commission? If there is to be such a body, will it meet more regularly and come to its conclusions much faster than the present appeals mechanisms in Blackpool, where it is admitted it takes an average on nine months for a decision to be reached, and often more than two years? When severely disabled people are involved, that is far too long.

Mr. Scott: In the context of the independent living fund, I do not believe that the establishment of a formal appeals procedure would be appropriate. Obviously, we as a Department are anxious to reduce to the minimum the time taken to settle ordinary appeals.

Mrs. Beckett: Surely the Minister must recall the dismay expressed at the decision to force the most severely disabled to approach a charity for help that used to come as of right from the state. Does he not recognise that that dismay will be exacerbated if, as seems to be the case from his answer today, there is no right of independent appeal against the decisions that that charity makes?

Mr. Scott: As I said in response to an earlier question, the vast majority of the support provided for the severely disabled will continue to come through income support and the premiums associated with it. This is a small fund, set up probably for a relatively short period, to meet the needs of a very small group. In those circumstances, I am sure that the flexibility associated with an independent trust, and trustees who are able to review matters with sympathy and compassion, is appropriate.

Hospitals (Nucleus System)

13. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the use being made of the nucleus system of hospital design.

The Minister for Health (Mr. Tony Newton): So far, 43 nucleus schemes have been completed and a further 76 are at various stages of planning design and construction. The total value of the programme is nearly £1·6 billion and we estimate that at least £30 million has been saved in fees and construction costs as a result of this standardised approach to hospital building.

Mr. Carrington: Would my right hon. Friend care to enlarge upon the cost benefits to the Health Service of the nucleus system and also to the contractors who service the Health Service?

Mr. Newton: For the Health Service, in terms of restraining costs, and for the contractors in terms of the efficiency with which they can do their work, the nucleus system has proved remarkably successful. Of course, it is not appropriate to use it on all sites because one has to take account of particular circumstances. However, we are hoping that its use will grow.

Mr. Dalyell: Do the Minister's professional architectural advisers have unambigious confidence in the system?

Mr. Newton: As far as I am aware, the answer is yes. No system, especially one of this sort, will be without problems and we seek to learn from experience as the programme goes on. Basically, it has been an outstandingly successful system.

NHS (Building Programme)

19. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many capital schemes in the health service are under construction; and how many have been completed since 1979.

Mr. Newton: Information held centrally on health building schemes, each costing over £1 million, shows that 140 schemes are presently under construction; an additional 300 schemes have been completed since April 1979.

Mr. Shaw: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that in my district health authority, South East Kent, and also in the South East Thames region, there have been a number of good and useful capital projects during the past eight years under this Government and that, as a result, the general well-being and health of the people in the area have benefited considerably?

Mr. Newton: Indeed I would. The South East Thames region has some good community care projects.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 12 April.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. I was also present at Windsor for the arrival of His Majesty The King of Norway. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I will be attending a state banquet in honour of His Majesty The King of Norway.

Dr. Reid: What advice does the Prime Minister have today for over 4 million of Britain's poorest people who stand to lose because of the social security changes? What does she have to say to Britain's oldest pensioners who stand to be robbed of £91 a year, or to Britain's youngest unemployed who lose £405 a year? Will she tell them that it is all an incentive to work harder, or will she finally admit that it is the biggest betrayal of Britain's poor since the welfare state was set up?

The Prime Minister: The extra money, in particular the money provided in the coming financial year, against a background of fewer unemployed, is being targeted particularly to help the poorest among our people. Indeed, now that the new system is in operation, in cash terms, there will be 5 million gainers compared with fewer than 1 million losers.

Mr. Churchill: In welcoming Secretary-General Gorbachev's announced withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, may I ask my right hon. Friend to send a message of warm congratulations to the Afghan freedom fighters on their courageous and victorious struggle over eight long years against the most powerful army in the world? Will she never forget that to this day 120 million people of eastern Europe and the Baltic republics remain under the Soviet tank track and that they, too, are entitled to freedom and national self-determination?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I agree with my hon. Friend. It is because of the splendid resistance of the people of Afghanistan against the occupying power that

the Soviet troops have decided to pull out. That decision is a welcome one and we should recognise the tremendous role of the freedom fighters.

Mr. Kinnock: The effects of housing benefit changes on pensioners across the country are now obvious to the country and to hon. Members on both sides of the House. Therefore, will the Prime Minister amend the regulations to ensure that no one with accessible capital of less than £10,000 will lose housing benefit or help with rates?

The Prime Minister: No, Sir. As I have said to the right hon. Gentleman before, it was a matter of policy that we should target the benefits on those in greatest need. Even after the reforms, more will be spent in real terms and more people will be receiving housing benefit than was the case in 1979. The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that there is nothing unusual or unknown about rent help being subjected to a capital limit. When rent help came under supplementary benefit, it came under the maximum capital disregard limit, which under the right hon. Gentleman's Government was £1,200.

Mr. Kinnock: If the right hon. Lady will do nothing to help people with £6,000 in lifetime savings, may I give her the case of someone with just £1,600 in total savings? She is a single woman, 73 years of age, who is disabled, diabetic and virtually housebound, who does not smoke or drink. She has a weekly pension and occupational pension totalling just over £50 a week. That lady is now losing £6·80 a week because of reductions in housing benefit and help with her rates. Her already low income is being cut by 12 per cent. When she, and thousands like her, ask, "How can I economise?", can the Prime Minister tell her?

The Prime Minister: I saw this morning in the *Daily Mirror* an account of a particular case—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister has a right to answer the question.

The Prime Minister: The account that was given was substantially inaccurate—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call upon the Prime Minister to answer.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend, having had time to look up all the facts, gave the House the facts and they were totally different from those reported. If the right hon. Gentleman wants a particular case looked up, perhaps he will contact my right hon. Friend and give him the facts. In the meantime, the right hon. Gentleman will know that £46 billion is being spent on social security. He talks about thrift and savings. Let me remind him that inflation under the Labour Government robbed people of their savings, so we take no lectures from him. They robbed people of 5 to 6 per cent. of their savings every quarter.

Mr. Kinnock: Perhaps the Prime Minister will now answer the question that I asked her. Will she tell a disabled diabetic, of 73 years of age, with £1,600 in capital and an income of just over £50 a week—[HON. MEMBERS: "What's her name?"]—Miss Lilian Williams of Manchester. There is no need for the Prime Minister to take the reference from me, as she has already had a letter from Miss Williams. Perhaps she will answer the question of how Mrs. Williams economises on that kind of sum, instead of relating her remarks to the *Daily Mirror*.

As for that issue, that newspaper printed the full facts of Mrs. Godden's income. Her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services has just made it apparent that he does not think that women with multiple sclerosis should have holidays.

The Prime Minister: No. If the right hon. Gentleman wants to take up the full details, he will do it in the proper way, through the Department for Social Security.

For those who are living alone and are disabled, a great deal depends on the kind of domiciliary help that they receive. As in Bristol, the local authority should be in touch to see what domestic help is required. They can also apply to the independent living fund for extra help. That is precisely what the independent living fund is there for. Perhaps he will pass on that message.

Mr. Kinnock *rose*——

Hon. Members: "Oh".

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Kinnock: How does Mrs. Williams, and thousands like her, economise when she has lost 12 per cent. of her income? Will the Prime Minister please answer the question?

The Prime Minister: I have done. I have said that for people who are disabled—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I say again to the whole House that behaviour of this kind, and I am saying this to both sides of the House, gives this place a very bad reputation.

The Prime Minister: If people are disabled, there is an extra £60 million—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."]—yes, I will answer the question if I am allowed to do so. An extra £60 million will go to the sick and disabled through the disability premium. There is also a severe disability premium which will channel an extra £8 million to an estimated extra 7,000 of the most severely disabled. It can mean that a person living alone will now get £24 a week in place of £6. In case neither of these apply, we have set up an independent living fund which is already —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I say to the whole House that it is no good shouting at the Prime Minister to answer the question when she is actually doing that.

The Prime Minister: We have set up an independent living fund, to be run by independent trustees, to allow the most severely disabled to live independently in the community. There is an interim address for the fund, and people who think that they may be eligible for help should apply now. I repeat, £46 billion: had the right hon. Gentleman's Government paid anything like that, he would have shouted it from the housetops with acclaim.

Mr. Nelson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, just as the scourge of terrorism is indiscriminate and knows no boundaries, so the fight against it should be international and co-operative?

The Prime Minister: Yes. Of course we fight terrorism in every way we can. As regards the Kuwait hijacking, we are very glad that the United Kingdom passengers were released; but hostage-taking of this kind affects all countries, and we have strong sympathies for the Kuwaitis and the Cypriots in dealing with the problem and fully support the line that they are taking.

Mr. Steel: Did the Prime Minister see the report published yesterday by the Church of Scotland, which showed that in 1985 31 per cent. of the population of

Scotland were living either in poverty or on its margins? Is she appalled by that figure, or is it, too, "substantially inaccurate"?

The Prime Minister: I did not see that report, but I commend most warmly to the right hon. Gentleman an excellent speech just made in Scotland by the Chief Secretary, pointing out that earned income per head in Scotland is higher than anywhere else in the United Kingdom save the south-east. If people did not run Scotland down, but allowed it to live up to its enterprise, it might have a lot better chance than under the right hon. Gentleman's strictures.

Rev. Ian Paisley: In view of the recent serious happenings in Northern Ireland, will the right hon. Lady tell the House when her Government will bring in proposals to deal with the Sinn Fein/IRA godfathers in the councils of Northern Ireland? Is she aware that as her Secretary of State at present holds conversations with the Social Democratic and Labour party, that party is holding conversations with the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Mr. Adams) and the Sinn Fein/IRA leadership? Is she aware that the purpose of these talks, as the SDLP has declared it, is to get Sinn Fein to the conference table? Will she take it from me and my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux), the leader of the Unionst party, that we will never sit down with Sinn Fein or with the IRA?

The Prime Minister: I understand what the hon. Gentleman says. As he knows, we condemn not only the use of violence but those political parties which support the use of violence. Ministers of this Government have no contact whatsoever with Sinn Fein and will not deal with inquiries from them. On this we are absolutely at one with the hon. Member, and I would have thought that most hon. Members hold the same view.

Q2. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 12 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Nellist: In between mouthfuls at tonight's banquet, and with her well-known sympathy for widows, could the Prime Minister advise my constituent in Binley, in Coventry, who yesterday received the £1·65 increase in her widowed mother's pension but lost the right to free school meals for her four children and therefore will have to pay £13·20 a week extra, just how she is expected to manage? When will this millionaire Prime Minister start attacking poverty and stop attacking the poor?

The Prime Minister: The highest ever social security budget—*[Interruption.]* Yes, the highest ever social security budget in real terms has been targeted on the poorest, as a result of which, in cash terms, this week there are 5 million people who have more than they had before. There are 2 million who have no change and there are just under 1 million who have a decrease. Fortunately, opposite the right hon. Gentleman there are 5 million people who have benefited in cash terms this week from increased social security, the level of which could never have occurred but for the increased prosperity of this country.

Social Security System (Changes)

3.31 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House——

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): The Prime Minister has answered no questions at all.

Mr. Cook: I beg to ask leave——

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Go on; get off to your banquet.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) does not resume his seat, I shall have to take serious action.

Mr. Cook: I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am listening to an application under Standing Order No. 20.

Mr. Cook: I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the impact of the changes in the social security system."

I shall submit three brief reasons, all relevant to the considerations set out in Standing Orders, why I ask leave to move the Adjournment.

First, it is now abundantly clear that the Government's estimate that only 12 per cent. of claimants will be worse off is difficult to reconcile with reality. The Government's own social security advisory committee last week put the losers at 43 per cent. The House must have an early opportunity to debate ministerial statements that would appear to be misleading and are not supported by their own advisers.

Secondly, this is the first occasion on which the House has met since the changes were implemented and since individual claimants learnt of their predicament—individual claimants such as the constituent I saw at the weekend, on invalidity benefit of £72 a week, who lost £12 a week in housing benefit. Every Labour Member has met such constituents during the recess. Indeed, I read that a survey of 100 Conservative Members revealed that two-thirds are seriously concerned by the changes. It is only right that the House should give those Members an early opportunity to express their concern in Parliament.

Thirdly, the matter is urgent; it is desperately urgent for the victims of the changes. A week's delay in debating their plight is another week in which they have to shift and to survive on sharply reduced benefits.

This is an important matter. The changes affect the living standards of 7 million claimants and their families. The increasingly harsh policy has troubled the conscience not just of bishops but of the nation. This House would be failing in its duty if it did not secure an early opportunity to challenge Ministers to say why they are making the poor poorer when they have the money to make the rich richer.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purposes of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the impact of the changes in the social security system".

I am satisfied that the matter raised by the hon. Member is proper to be discussed under Standing Order No. 20. Has the hon. Gentleman the leave of the House?

The leave of the House having been given, the motion stood over, under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) until the commencement of public business tomorrow.

Mr. Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Not, I hope, to challenge what I have just said.

Mr. Miller: I am not in the habit of challenging the rulings of the Chair. I have never done so. I seek guidance as to whether I can similarly jog backwards two years to legislation which has subsequently been debated in detail on a number of occasions. May I hope to have a similarly favourable reply?

Mr. Speaker: Every application is considered on its merits.

Points of Order

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I accept that in politics we have to take the rough and tumble, but when I was asking a question of the Secretary of State for Social Services all my hon. Friends heard the hon. Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay) accuse me of being a friend of the hijackers. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I am the chair of the Labour Back Bench foreign affairs committee, but I have never in any way supported hijackers. I ask you to ask the hon. Member to withdraw what he said.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is common knowledge in the House that the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) is a close friend of fundamentalist—[HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."]

Mr. Speaker: Order. We cannot have a debate on the matter. If the hon. Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay) made that comment, which I would consider unworthy of him and unlikely, he should withdraw it. We are all honourable Members of the House.

Mr. MacKay: It is common knowledge that the hon. Member for Dundee, West is a close friend of fundamentalist Shi'ite groups in the middle east. To that extent, I said that he was a friend of the hijackers, who also fall into that category. If it helps you, Mr. Speaker, I am more than happy to make it clear that I would not imagine for one moment that the hon. Member for Dundee, West would wish to associate with the actions of the terrorists who are at the moment holding a plane at Larnaca—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we are starting a new part of the Session. I hope that we will proceed in good order and set a good example in the House. This is a place where freedom of speech is absolutely supreme, but we must give each other a fair hearing and not cast aspersions upon each other's characters.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. What the hon. Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay) said was in no way a withdrawal of his accusation against my extremely hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross). In fairness, I think that you should ask him to withdraw in the way which you usually demand of Opposition Members. When Opposition Members have sought partially to justify what they have said, you have not accepted that as a withdrawal. We think that is only right and proper that the hon. Member for Berkshire, East should withdraw what he said, because it was a vile accusation against my hon. Friend.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay) referred to helping me. It is a question not of helping me but of doing the right thing by the House. Will he get up and make it plain that he withdraws his comment?

Mr. MacKay: As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, to help the House, to help you and to help the hon. Member for Dundee, West, I will make it clear—[HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."]

Mr. Speaker: Order. It does not help the House at all. The hon. Gentleman should do the right thing by the House and clearly withdraw the comment.

Mr. MacKay: I withdraw the comment that the hon. Member for Dundee, West associates with the actions of the hijackers at Larnaca.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. When questions are framed to the Prime Minister which are of a specific nature and mention detail, has not the questioner a right to receive a proper answer from her? Did not the Prime Minister evade question after question? The answers that the general public and the Opposition have a right to hear were never given by the Prime Minister. What defence have we against that?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that it has never been possible for the occupant of the Chair to demand the answers that any hon. Member may wish to have. Every Minister and Prime Minister answers questions in his or her own way.

Mr. Ernie Ross: Further to the point of order concerning the hon. Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay) and myself, I wish to place on record the fact that I am not friends with any fundamentalist Shi'ite group anywhere in the world.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure the whole House will accept that.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): As one who takes a different view on middle east questions from that of my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross), I do not for one moment question his honesty and total opposition to all forms of hijacking.

Returning to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery), you, Mr. Speaker, have complained at various times about noise from the Opposition side of the House, but when the Prime Minister absolutely refuses to answer questions there will obviously be noise and frustration from Opposition Members. On many occasions during today's Question Time my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) gave details of constituents who had been penalised as a result of the social security legislation. Surely——

Mr. Speaker: Order. What is reprehensible—the House and the country would think it reprehensible also—is if we do not give each other a fair hearing in this place. It is not in order to shout each other down.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I ask you to confirm that it was most discourteous of the Prime Minister to march out of the Chamber—she was clearly angry—just before my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) rose to make an application for an emergency debate on the social fund and the damage being imposed on millions of our constituents?

Mr. Speaker: That is plainly not a matter for the Chair. I have no knowledge why the Prime Minister or indeed any other right hon. or hon. Member leaves the Chamber; it cannot be a matter for me.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Ordered,

That European Community Documents Nos. 8251/86 and 10383/87 on the export and import of certain dangerous chemicals be referred to a Standing Committee on European Community Documents.—*[Mr. David Hunt.]*

Blacklists (Access to Information)

3.43 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to give persons a right of access to any information held by any organisation for the purpose of blacklisting.

The Bill would give people rights that they are denied at present because of a loophole in the Data Protection Act 1984. At present, anyone can seek information held about himself by any organisation, but that right extends only to information held on computer. Paper and card indexes are not covered by the Act. Therefore, it is not so much a loophole; it is more a yawning chasm through which any organisation which spies on innocent people going about their perfectly legitimate business can operate at will and with no possibility of redress for those whom it injures, provided that it keeps its information on cards and not on computer tape.

This is nonsensical. It is a blatant defiance of Parliament's intentions to give people access to information held about themselves, and it is an attack on the civil liberties of British citizens. It is astounding to think that such activities are perfectly legal, so their victims cannot take action. One organisation in particular, the Economic League, which was founded in 1919 and contributes to the Conservative party, recently had its activities exposed to the public gaze. It has long been suspected and known by inference that that organisation keeps information about individuals which it supplies to employers. Now we have seen proof on our television screens. One of my constituents was astonished to learn that she was on the list because of her active participation in Anti-Apartheid. Until a television programme producer showed her the Economic League's blacklist she had no idea she had ever come to the League's attention.

Other people have written to me since learning of my Bill, and one in particular, Mr. John Geleit, who was assistant secretary of the London region National Graphical Association, has been trying unsuccessfully since October 1987 to make the Economic League correct statements made about him that are wrong. He is described in the Economic League's "News Review" of June 1987 as a Communist, but he is a member of the Labour party and writes that he has never been a member of any party that can be construed as being Communist. We seem to be living in McCarthyite days when people feel forced to declare the famous words from that evil cold war era that was a blot on American history:

"I am not nor have I ever been".

We have come to a sad state of affairs when people feel forced to make such declarations.

The last piece of correspondence from the Economic League to him is dated 19 January 1988 and confirms:

"There is no entry in our computer records"—

the House will note that it says "computer records"—

"in respect of yourself."

The Economic League has not apologised to my constituent nor explained why it has been secretly blacklisting her—and it does not stop at Anti-Apartheid. Its own publication, "Companies Under Attack", lists in addition to Anti-Apartheid as suspect organisations: Oxfam, Christian Aid, CND, the Child Poverty Action Group, the Low Pay Unit, and many more. Most of us would regard such organisations as entirely blameless and, indeed, praiseworthy. We would think that anyone who

devotes voluntary effort to such causes deserves a lot of credit. All these organisations are completely open to public inspection and have no secrets from anyone. Their committee members' names and political affiliations, if any, are openly stated.

The Economic League, on the contrary, has kept its existence so quiet that many members of the general public will never have heard of it until recent months, but many of their employers have. It is known with certainty that more than 300 companies subscribe to this organisation and it has been surmised that there could be as many as 2,000. In 1986 alone, over 200,000 names were checked by member companies. However, it is difficult to prevent those who wish to engage in the contemptible activity of spying on their fellow citizens from doing so. By their very nature, such activities are hard to detect because people generally are trustful and open and do not suspect colleagues of sinister activities.

Therefore, I have drafted my Bill not to prevent the unpreventable but to require the following.

First, before any employer seeks information on a prospective employee from any organisation that holds information for the purpose of blacklisting, he or she shall obtain the permission of the job applicant.

Secondly, the job applicant shall be given a copy of all information held about her or him by the organisation or organisations to which the prospective employer has applied, whether the information is held on computer tape or indexes or any other method of holding information.

Thirdly, any organisation holding information on individuals' political views, memberships and activities shall send, on request and within 40 days, a copy of all such information held about her or him, no matter the form in which such information is held, so that a check can be made on the accuracy of this information, action can be taken to correct or erase factually inaccurate data and, as with the Data Protection Act, a person may seek compensation for factual mistakes in the data which cause financial loss or physical injury or distress.

The Bill, if successful, would deal with an organisation that is

"unaccountable, unofficial, funded by business management to pry into legitimate political activity . . . which is becoming a police force . . . and is highly dangerous and quite improper."

These words are not mine; they are the words of John Alderson, a former chief constable.

I hope that the Bill will have wide support, and I urge every hon. Member to protect the civil liberties of her or his constituents by calling for time to be made available to debate the Bill at a later date.

In conclusion, I thank all those who wrote to me to express their concern or to give accounts of their own dealings with the Economic League.

3.49 pm

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): I wish to oppose the Bill because it is clearly vindictive and selective. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) knows that there is no chance of it becoming law, so she has used the opportunity to attack a specific organisation, the Economic League.

The attack in the Bill is part of a campaign of attack against the Economic League which was started a year ago by Left-wing journalists on the "World in Action" programme. Indeed, "World in Action" has made no fewer than three programmes on that organisation in the past 12 months. The biased Left-wing record of Granada's "World in Action" programme is well documented. The Media Monitoring Unit report for 1986 shows that 54·2 per cent. of Granada's political programmes were biased to the Left. We should remember that by law programmes are supposed to be politically balanced. In 1987, the Media Monitoring Unit reported that bias in "World in Action" programmes has risen to 68·7 per cent. No doubt the broadcasting by Granada of programmes which are so consistently politically biased will be considered when the ITV contracts come up for renewal—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but again I say to the House that we must give each other a fair hearing. It is quite wrong to barrack from a sedentary position.

Mr. Riddick: I am most grateful to you, Mr. Speaker.

The "World in Action" programmes relating to the Economic League were a mixture of truth, half-truth, lies and fiction. As I had read in the press that the hon. Member for Maryhill was intending to use the Bill to attack the Economic League, I did a little research into the organisation because I did not know a great deal about it. I had seen one of the "World in Action" programmes, but, apart from that, I knew very little about it. It is a shame that the hon. Member for Maryhill did not take the opportunity to find out a little more about the organisation, as I believe that such an opportunity was offered to her by the director general of the Economic League.

The Economic League was set up in 1919 to promote democracy, free enterprise and freedom. It promotes a better understanding of the economic facts of life, for example, by producing such publications as a recent document on British manufacturing. Part of that work involves monitoring the activities of political extremists of both the far Left and the far Right, as well as those of anarchists. Consequently, it can give companies factual information about political extremists who might try to gain employment solely to cause strikes and disruption from political motives.

We know only too well that such people exist. Everyone has heard of "Red Robbo" and the mole, Alan Thornett. Last year, the *Evening Standard* was able to unveil the plot to take over a British Telecom branch in the City of London. Only recently British Rail had to sack a Socialist Worker party activist who was deliberately causing industrial havoc at King's Cross. One can imagine how much trouble British Rail and its customers would have been saved if the company had been aware of what that individual was likely to get up to.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Riddick: I have no intention of giving way. This is a ten-minute Bill.

The Economic League monitors all far Left and far Right organisations. It must be a pretty frightful job because these are just some of the Left-wing organisations' newspapers. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Maryhill is worried about the league. Perhaps one reason why some Opposition Members are making such a noise

[Mr. Riddick]

from sedentary positions is that they are worried that the Economic League may have something on them if they are Left-wing extremists—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that I can anticipate the hon. Gentleman's point of order. I hope that the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) is not suggesting that the Economic League might, in the hon. Gentleman's words, have anything "on" anyone in this House.

Mr. Riddick: I was going to be very helpful to any hon. Members who might be afraid about that and inform them that the Economic League would be very happy to tell them what information it is holding on them, if indeed it holds any such information. Hon. Members simply have to ring the Economic League and ask for the information.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It would seem that the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) is making an admission on behalf of the Economic League that it carries out systematic surveillance of Members of this House. I hope that you, Mr. Speaker, will ask the hon. Gentleman to make clear whether that is the case because clearly it would raise serious implications if it were true.

Mr. Speaker: I agree. Will the hon. Member for Colne Valley make it absolutely clear that he is not seeking to cast aspersions on any hon. Member, on either side of the House?

Mr. Riddick: I do not think that I was casting any aspersions. In fact——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It would help the House if the hon. Gentleman made that absolutely clear. He made a veiled allegation that that was the case.

Mr. Riddick: I have no intention of casting aspersions; I do not want to do that. If any Opposition Members, or other hon. Members, fear that their names might be on a list held by the Economic League, they simply have to ring the league and ask whether that is the case. That is all they have to do. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will collect his papers and then we can continue.

Mr. Riddick: The hon. Member for Maryhill is not in the least interested in the facts and the truth about the organisation. She is trying to discredit an organisation which does an effective and efficient job in exposing militant industrial saboteurs. That is clearly a function which many Opposition Members do not like, and they have a vested interest in trying to prevent that work from being performed properly and efficiently. Do Opposition Members believe that it is sensible that a responsible employer with a large ethnic minority work force should be aware that someone whom that employer is considering appointing as personnel manager has a track record of activism in the National Front? Do Opposition Members believe that a company should be aware of that important point?

The Bill is selective, vindictive and ill thought out. It is fraught with implications which have not been properly thought through. I hope that the House will join me in opposing the Bill, which would add nothing to the legislation of this House.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at Commencement of Public Business):—

The House divided: Ayes 138, Noes 49.

Division No. 248] **[3.59 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Boyes, Roland
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Leighton, Ron
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McCartney, Ian
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Wilson, Brian

Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John McAllion and
Mr. Tony Worthington.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Beggs, Roy
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boswell, Tim
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Gregory, Conal
Grylls, Michael
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Lawrence, Ivan
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Riddick, Graham
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Sims, Roger
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jacques Arnold and
Mr. Hugo Summerson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mrs. Maria Fyfe, Mr. Harry Cohen, Mr. Ken Eastham, Mr. Max Madden, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. Ian McCartney, Mr. William McKelvey, Mr. Bob McTaggart, Dr. Lewis Moonie, Mr. Ernie Ross, Mr. Dennis Skinner, and Mr. Keith Vaz.

Blacklists (Access to Information)

Mrs. Maria Fyfe accordingly presented a Bill to give persons a right of access to any information held by any organisation for the purpose of blacklisting: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 29 April and to be printed. [Bill 129.]

Mrs. Mahon: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. Member opposing the Bill was a consultant or paid adviser to the Economic League, would he have to declare an interest?

Mr. Speaker: I should think that the answer to that is yes, but the hon. Lady will have to look in the Register of Members' Interests for matters of that kind.

Mr. Riddick: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Any hon. Member is allowed to make a speech in opposition to a ten-minute Bill. That is what I was doing. There is no question whatever that I am in the pay of the Economic League. If I were, that information would be in the Register of Members' Interests. I suggest that the hon. Lady looks there for any details.

Mr. Speaker: I must say to the hon. Member that I was making no allegations. That is exactly what I said.

Orders of the Day

School Boards (Scotland) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

4.13 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Government, in formulating the proposals within the Bill and their broad education policy, were motivated by three major considerations.

The first was the necessity of ensuring that the Scottish educational tradition, which still has a continuing relevance and significance to youngsters in Scotland, is fully taken into account in any developments in our policy and in any changes that are proposed.

Secondly, I believe that the view is widely held throughout education in Scotland that it is no longer tolerable that parents in Scotland—indeed, Scotland is alone in western Europe in this respect—should play an almost insignificant part in the education process that affects their children. Almost everyone in education has expressed the view that the existing arrangements in Scotland are inadequate, that the existing school councils have not lived up to the expectations of those who introduced them and that greater parental involvement is necessary. That is the second premise on which our proposals were based.

Thirdly, and equally important, the extent to which parents in any community with regard to any school should assume executive or advisory responsibilities over that school should be determined by the parents themselves and not by the Government or by the local authority. If we believe in the principle of parental involvement, clearly it is inappropriate for the Government or for local authorities to determine the extent to which parents should be able, permitted or empowered to take into account the responsibilities that they wish to enjoy.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): I apologise for intervening so early in the Secretary of State's speech, but he is a lawyer and a man gifted in words. He referred to executive responsibility intervention by parents. Will he define exactly what he means by "executive responsibility"?

Mr. Rifkind: Parents on school boards and councils should not be restricted to a purely advisory role. They should not say simply what they would like to happen. In certain areas of activity involving the school, parents or the school board should have the right to take decisions. They should be involved in the decisions rather than merely in advising others as to what those decisions should be. That is what I mean by executive responsibility as opposed to a purely advisory role.

When examining our proposals, it is obviously appropriate to start by considering the school councils set up in recent years, and the extent to which they can be said to meet the legitimate aspirations of parents and the requirements that are appropriate in the modern world.

[Mr. Rifkind]

Few hon. Members would dispute that the school councils have become relatively meaningless. Individual school councils in certain parts of Scotland are excellent, and I pay tribute to them. Sadly, they are relatively few and insignificant in the overall education structure in Scotland.

Many secondary and primary schools in Scotland do not have a school council. In many cases, such as in the Strathclyde region, a single school council exists for a grouping of schools comprising several secondary schools and a selection of feeder primary schools. That has not proved a satisfactory situation. School councils, where they exist, for the most part have insignificant powers and a purely advisory role. It is perhaps not surprising that relatively few parents of real ability have been drawn to serving on many of those school councils, because people of ability wish to play a useful role and not to be seen simply as an ornamental appendage to the function of the education authority.

There are those who argue that at present there is insufficient demand by parents to be involved in school councils. If I am allowed, I should like to refer the House to the splendid remark made in a comparable situation by the late Lord Palmerston. He said, "If I am told that people are unfit for constitutional government, then I say the best way to make them fit is to give it to them." Unless we give parents the opportunity meaningfully to be involved in the administration of the schools which their children attend, it is hardly surprising that they express little interest in the present school council arrangements.

Therefore, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Educational Institute of Scotland, the Scottish Parent-Teacher Council and pretty well the whole representative body of educational opinion accepts that the status quo is not satisfactory and it is necessary to replace it with something more meaningful that gives parents a real involvement in the schools which their children attend. I do not think that that general principle would divide the House any more than it would divide those who are interested in Scottish education.

Against that background, the Government introduced proposals for the establishment of school boards. As the House will be aware, there has been a major consultation exercise and the Government received a large number of responses as a result of which we made a number of very important changes to our original proposals. Those changes were made in a number of areas and especially in three major categories.

First, we accepted the logic that, if it is our view that parents should determine the overall responsibilities of an individual school council, it was inappropriate to allow the Secretary of State a power by general order to increase the minimum powers which all the school boards would have —that it should be for parents to decide rather than that there should be an increase throughout Scotland, irrespective of parents' wishes in any individual community.

Secondly, we accepted the basic argument of many parents that if we allowed any increase in the powers of school boards to be determined purely by the parents on those boards, an unrepresentative group pf parents might facilitate a major increase in the responsibilities of school boards without the support of the parental community as a whole. Consequently, we have introduced a major change into the Bill. It ensures that if a school board wishes to increase its functions and responsibilities but does not have the support of the education authority, it cannot appeal to the Secretary of State unless it holds a ballot of the parents and is then able to demonstrate that it enjoys the support of the parents in the local community for the increase in the powers that is sought.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): I have written to the right hon. and learned Member regarding the schools that are earmarked for closure in my constituency. Will it be too late for the schools to which I referred him to take advantage of this legislation?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is concerned about the proposed closure of certain schools in his constituency. He appreciates that the Secretary of State's powers to prevent closure will be based on the regulations that have been tabled. There is nothing in the Bill to prevent an education authority from seeking to close an individual school. If the hon. Gentleman were to table amendments to the Bill, he might find that he has some allies. We look forward to hearing his views. I have no doubt that they will carry weight with his colleagues and with the House as a whole.

I was referring to the changes that we have made as a result of the consultation exercise. The third major change is clarification of the role of school boards. We have never intended to interfere with the professional judgment of teachers. Parents have an important and a significant role to play on school boards, but they should not supplant teachers in the exercise of their professional judgment. Much that goes on within schools can properly be determined only by those in the teaching profession. However, there are many administrative and ancillary educational matters in which parents should be involved. All those who have the best interests of education at heart should be willing to acknowledge that fact.

It would be appropriate for me to anticipate the question that I suspect may be put to me about opting out and its implications. I confirm that opting out by Scottish schools is not provided for in the Bill. The Government have made it clear that they do not intend to introduce amendments to the Bill to provide for such a power. If the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) were to persuade us otherwise, we might have to reconsider the matter, but in the absence of such an initiative that is our view and we intend to keep to it.

The Government's position was spelt out by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), in the Scottish Grand Committee. He said:

> "We have always made it clear that if there is evidence of real and substantial demand for opting out, we would not stand in the way."

That remains our view. In the weeks and months to come we shall have to assess the interest of Scottish parents in the possible right of opting out.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): I thank the Secretary of State both for giving way and for having written the script for us. He has anticipated our questions and has also provided us with ammunition by referring to the meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee in Edinburgh. Does he recall that the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) referred to the fact that in the private sector that is so much admired by the Government

parents exercise their preference by the cheque book? What safeguards are the Government willing to write into the legislation to ensure that those who are being educated in the public sector and whose parents are in a favoured position because they have bank accounts and cheque books do not exercise a similar influence as the parents of children who are being educated privately? What safeguards will there be to ensure that gifts cannot be given and that contributions rather than fees are not made? What safeguards will there be to guarantee that the cheque book choice cannot be applied in the public sector?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman appreciates that the power of parents in the private sector is their ability at any time to withdraw their children from a school if they are dissatisfied with it and send them to another school. Parents in the private sector have a power that is not available to parents in the public sector. They can choose which school their children attend. If the Opposition believe that parents in the private sector are privileged, their objective should be to extend that privilege, so far as possible, to the public sector. We want the vast majority of parents to have the kind of choice that parents in the private sector take for granted.

The Bill makes it quite clear that it would not be open to a school board to decide whether fees should be paid in a local authority school. That power is not available to a school board. It cannot change the character of the school. The school will remain a local authority school, with the major considerations that determine the character of that school continuing to be determined by the education authority.

We responded significantly and substantially to the various comments that were made during the consultation process. There was a favourable response to it. There is a wide degree of consensus that the Government's proposals are worthy of support and deserve to be endorsed by the House.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): The Secretary of State referred to opting out. What evidence is there in Scotland of a demand by people for the power to opt out? The *Glasgow Herald* reported last month that the Secretary of State would introduce the Bill, that the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) would table an amendment and that the Secretary of State had been told by the Prime Minister that he must accept it as it allows for opting out. It is most important that the Secretary of State should clear up that point now.

Mr. Rifkind: If the hon. Member is so concerned about that issue, he might at least have read what the Government said a couple of weeks ago. We made it abundantly clear that the Bill in its present form or during its passage through the House will not be altered by the Government's acceptance of amendments that would introduce the right to opt out. We have also made it clear that we do not rule out such a power in the future. I repeat the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling:

"We have always made it clear that if there is evidence of real and substantial demand for opting out, we would not stand in the way."—[*Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 21 March 1988; c. 37.]

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): What would the Secretary of State accept as real and substantial evidence of support for opting out? That will clearly be important in the future.

Mr. Rifkind: I shall respond to that question in general terms, but not in specific terms. As I have made clear, the Government have no proposals for opting out in this Bill, and would not be inclined to accept any amendment put forward for that purpose. There is therefore no need for me to respond as the hon. Gentleman has suggested. Let me, however, reply to the more general aspect of his question.

As I have said, along with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, we shall naturally be interested to see the extent of demand for the right to opt out. The hon. Member for Springburn asked me a few moments ago for a reassurance that his constituents may exercise such a right if the Bill is given a Third Reading. If such a question is put to me by a Labour Member, it is not unreasonable to assume that others in Scotland—perhaps a significant number—may have a similar interest. Already many parents have expressed such an interest, and we have received letters at the Scottish Office asking for that power. But it is early days for us to assess the extent of the interest.

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): Is the Secretary of State aware of the Prime Minister's interest in the matter? Following his change of heart, has he consulted her recently, and, if so, is she happy about it?

Mr. Rifkind: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I have not changed my mind. My views are those expressed by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary on 21 March, and I was happy that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, when in Scotland, expressed exactly the same views. The hon. Gentleman may recall that, when asked by the BBC whether she could confirm that opting out of local authority control would now go ahead in Scotland, my right hon. Friend responded:

"No, I cannot confirm that it will definitely go ahead."

She went on to say:

"the first thing we had to do was to see that every school has a school board. Then we have to take further soundings to see if sufficient people would like to have opting out as an option. No one is compelling anyone to do anything."

My right hon. Friend's view is exactly the same as that expressed by my hon. Friend on 21 March—and by me—and, indeed, on successive occasions in recent months.

I am not certain whether the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) would have preferred me to give a different answer, but that happens to be the position.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): Would not the Secretary of State express some regret to the electorate in Scotland? During the general election campaign, he gave a firm assurance that the proposals for opting out were no part of the proposals for Scotland, and during this Parliament—until the next election—applied only to England and Wales. Does he not feel that he misled the people of Scotland during the campaign?

Mr. Rifkind: No. I was very careful in what I said during the election period, and indeed since then. I am very conscious of the need to ensure that the position is properly defined. Throughout the debate on these matters, I have said that the Bill will not contain proposals for opting out, which it does not; that we do not intend to table amendments to the Bill which would provide for such a power, which we do not; and that we leave open whether opting out may be introduced in future. I have always made clear, in the election period and since, that given that we do not have a history of school boards or governors in

[Mr. Rifkind]

Scotland of the kind that we are now creating, the first stage must be their creation. As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and others have said, we must then gauge whether there is a demand for a further power.

I emphasise that the mere introduction of such a power does not in itself mean that that power will be implemented. As Opposition Members will be the first to acknowledge, if they are convinced that no parents in Scotland will be interested in the right of opting out, it must be asked what they are worried about. Who do they believe would exercise such a power? If they believe that no one would do so, why are they getting into such a tizzy about whether the provision should be introduced?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Rifkind: I shall happily give way in a moment, but it would be interesting if whoever I give way to at least tried to explain why the Opposition are concerned about a power that they believe no one will wish to use.

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): To explain why we are worried, may I give the instance of a particular school where the majority of parents come from outside the catchment area and, indeed, the town itself? They may choose to opt out while keeping the school in another area which is not even the catchment area. That is why we are worried.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman seems to be expressing concern that a school that finds that its views are totally rejected by the education authority may decide that the interests of the local community could be better served by a different form of administration. He is saying, therefore, that he believes that there would be a demand for such a power.

I repeat that either hon. Members believe that there is no interest in such a power, or they believe that there is and wish that there was not. Whichever is the case, I hope that we need not be detained much longer on the matter, because it is not in the Bill, and will not be. If it is in a future Bill, hon. Members will have an enormous amount of time to consider it.

It appears that Opposition Members can find nothing of which to disapprove in the current Bill, and therefore wish to spend as much time as possible seeking the Government's views on what might be in future legislation but is not now before the House, was not announced in the Queen's Speech and will not be subject to an amendment.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): Is it not rather extraordinary, therefore, that Labour Members have tabled an amendment accusing my right hon. and learned Friend of paying only lip service to the need for genuine involvement? If they really wanted even more genuine involvement, would he not expect them to table an amendment in Standing Committee for opting out?

Mr. Rifkind: It appears that the hon. Member for Springburn may do so—unless he is drafted into the chairmanship of the Committee. My hon. Friend is quite right: I shall come to that point later.

I am equally intrigued about why we are accused of paying only lip service to parental involvement, and we all wait with eager anticipation for the various powers that the Opposition want to be introduced into the Bill—which the Government, in their timidity, have forgotten to put forward. If we are patient for a few minutes, that information may be vouchsafed to us.

Mr. Darling: Can the Secretary of State confirm, for the avoidance of doubt, that no opting-out provisions will be accepted by the Government during the passage of the Bill, and that if opting out is to come in the future it will be through fresh legislation being introduced to that effect?

If that is correct, can the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that the exchange of memoranda between his private staff and those of the Prime Minister will be set aside and will be of no effect, as will the amendment to be tabled by his tame friend on the Back Benches?

Mr. Rifkind: I must say to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) that, if this afternoon's debate has achieved nothing else, it has at least made the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) a much better informed Member of the House. Although the first 15 times that we said what he asked us to say did not make an impact on his consciousness, it appears that on the 16th occasion I am able to confirm what he has put to me in a way that he has been able to understand. We can now move on to other matters.

I said that the Government had made a number of important changes to the original proposals. Consequently, the matters currently before us have been seen to be widely acceptable. For example, the Scottish Parent-Teacher Council has said:

> "These proposals should no longer be regarded as an attack on teachers' professionalism, but an opportunity for parents to provide a much-needed formal input to their children's schools".

The general secretary of the Educational Institute of Scotland said that the Government deserved

> "credit for responding to public opinion".

The *Times Educational Supplement* said that the Government were "Truly a listening Government". That is of great significance.

It is against that background that we must express some puzzlement about the Opposition amendment. In their amendment they say that they decline to give a Second Reading to a Bill that

> "pays only lip service to the genuine need to encourage parental involvement in Scotland's schools".

We understand that the Opposition are entirely in favour of the principle of parental involvement but are against the practice of it as represented by the Bill. I see that the hon. Member for Fife, Central is nodding vigorously in agreement. I have to warn the Opposition that they are in great danger of becoming Liberals if they are against the practice but in favour of the principle.

Mr. Worthington: That is a slur.

Mr. Rifkind: I know that. However, I claim the privileges of the House in making such an accusation. I realise the full seriousness of it and I am sure that the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) will wish to use his opportunity in replying to the debate to issue a scathing renunciation of any such suggestion.

In all seriousness, we are entitled to question the curious paradox whereby the Opposition maintain that there is little real interest in parental executive responsibility while, at the same time, they believe that the introduction and implementation of a Bill such as this would have a devastating effect on Scottish education.

Labour Members are really concerned that, as on many previous occasions, when the Government introduce new opportunities, they create an interest which many people do not expect to see. For example, when we introduced the parents' charter many Labour Members asked us why we did so and what demand there had been for it from parents in Scotland. We were told that that demand was a figment of the Government's imagination and that everyone was perfectly content with the current arrangements used by education authorities. However, we have found that, since the introduction of the charter, more than 117,000 parents in Scotland have effectively exercised their right under it. When we introduced regulations involving certain schools deemed to be closed, we were asked what interest there was and we were told that it was a figment of the Government's imagination. Since then we have received 3,000 letters in the Scottish Office congratulating the Government on introducing the regulations.

When we introduced the tenants' rights legislation we were asked what interest there was among tenants for buying their own homes. We were told that it was a figment of the Government's imagination. However, in Scotland, well over 100,000 tenants have purchased their own homes. Throughout the United Kingdom we have introduced privatisation and we have found that 8 million new shareholders have been created as a result of public interest. That is what the Opposition are really afraid of. The real question is not the level of demand now but whether by creating new opportunities the Government will receive a response from parents that will break up the cosy relationship among so many administrators who wish to exclude parents from any real involvement in the schools that their children attend. The view held by too many in the educational Socialist establishment is that schools are too important to be left to parents.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Did the right hon. and learned Gentleman see the report a couple of weeks ago in *The Independent*, which looked at the practice of the parents' charter rather than the principle of it? It looked at the way that it operates in Dundee and at the Harris academy in Dundee where the school population has been swollen to almost 2,000 while other schools in the city have only 500 or 600 pupils. The effect of that is that the teachers at Harris academy recommend that parents in Dundee do not send their children to that school because they will not receive a decent education because there are too many pupils. That is the practice of the charter. The principle is acceptable, but there are problems in the way in which it operates in cities such as Dundee. It is harming educational opportunities for children, not increasing them, and the Secretary of State should be aware of that.

Mr. Rifkind: On the contrary, I am aware that certain schools appear to be thought of by parents as more able to provide the education that they want for their children. The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) and his education authority should be asking why that is the case and what they can do to improve the other schools so as to make them as popular with parents.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that in Dundee there has, historically, been a number of schools, Harris academy being one of them, that parents desperately want their children to attend. There is nothing new about that. If the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) is suggesting that that is a recent phenomenon, he must be new to Dundee.

Mr. Rifkind: There is perhaps a genuine difference of attitude in these matters. The Conservative party takes the view, as do most parents, that if there are good schools and schools that are considered to be not so good——

Mr. Worthington: One makes them all good.

Mr. Rifkind: Yes. That is exactly what one does. The best way of identifying the schools that are responding to what parents wish is to allow the parents to have a considerable influence on the school that their child attends.

Mr. Galbraith: Does the Secretary of State agree that the parents' charter certainly has problems? He has received representations from parents of children at Lenzie academy, in my constituency, which is a so-called magnet school. Those parents have been to seen him about the problems that the charter has produced for that school causing it to bulge at the seams and suffer a deterioration in the education offered to its pupils. Does the Secretary of State agree with that?

Mr. Rifkind: If the charter is bringing about a deterioration in the education provided by the school, presumably parents in future will be less interested in sending their children there. Parents are interested in the quality of education. As the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) knows, the way in which the parents' charter operates is that all the children who live within the catchment area have the first claim on attending the school. If places are available when local children have been accommodated, children from other localities may be considered. That is the obligation under which the charter operates.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Did my right hon. and learned Friend hear the intervention from the spokesman for the Social and Liberal Democrats, the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce)? When talking about parental involvement and parental choice, the hon. Gentleman said that snob value was involved. Is it not an interesting outline of his party's policy if it believes that parental choice in education is made on snob value?

Mr. Rifkind: It is indicative not just of the view of the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) but of the basic prejudice of Opposition Members. They believe that if parents choose to send their children to a school that is not the local catchment area school, they can be motivated only by snobbish considerations—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) made that very accusation about Paisley grammar school. *[Interruption.]* He said it, not today but on a previous occasion. That is what I recollect him saying.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) *rose*——

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman has been referred to, so I will gladly give way.

Mr. Bruce: Does the Secretary of State accept that in the case of schools such as Harris academy and Aberdeen grammar parents are not making a choice on the academic record of the school? I am not saying that they are bad schools, but they are often not the best schools in the

[Mr. Bruce]

locality. The consequence of the choice is that even when the schools are overcrowded or, in the case of Aberdeen grammar, when a quarter of it has been burnt down, parents still want their children to attend, whereas other schools can accommodate them and give them a better education. We should address ourselves to the problem of ensuring that all schools provide the same standard of education.

Mr. Rifkind: I ask the hon. Gentleman what criteria he would use in regard to his own family when deciding what school they should attend. Would he not try to reach a judgment as to which school would be best for the education that he wishes for his children? If he expects to have that right for himself, why is he so anxious to withdraw it from other parents who might exercise slightly different criteria?

Mr. Galbraith *rose*——

Mr. Rifkind: I have given way many times. This is a debate rather than a question and answer session. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for sitting down. He obviously believes that my answers meet his requirements.

I should now refer to the provisions of the Bill. That is a customary thing to do on occasions such as this. The provisions of the Bill are clearly expressed and the Bill deals with the single subject of school boards. Our intention is to produce a free-standing Act as far as possible so that those who have to work with the Act, particularly parents and community members of boards, will not find unnecessary legal complications.

It may be helpful if I cover the main points of the Bill now. The first six clauses set up the new system of school boards, provide for the procedures for election and co-option and establish the fundamental procedural rules for board business. There will be a board for almost every primary, secondary and special school in Scotland. For small schools that could not support a board there is an exemption procedure. In such cases, parents and pupils at the school will have the right to information and to make representations to the school and to the education authority as if they were members of a board.

All boards will have parents, staff and co-opted members who will be drawn from the local community. There will be a majority of parent members on each board. That is fundamental to our purpose. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) commented on that in a debate in the Scottish Grand Committee. He questioned what he called the

"assumption that the school is somehow a mix of conflicting interests to be regarded as a power struggle."—[*Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 21 March 1988; c. 13.]

Of course, there are diverse interests and those of parents have been too muted in the past. The school board as we propose it will be the only place in the system where parents have a guaranteed voice. Boards exist for parents. So basic is that to our conception that we have provided in the Bill that if enough parents cannot be found to form a board that school will not have one.

The Bill also gives the Secretary of State power to set the precise number of members for boards in schools of different sizes or types. We intend to make regulations providing for different sizes of boards for schools, depending on the number of pupils at the school. In most cases, the range will be from seven board members, four of whom will be parents, to 13 board members, seven of whom will be parents. We shall provide details of our intentions for the Standing Committee and we shall discuss our proposals for regulations with education authorities and other interested parties before they are made.

The fundamental requirements for the election of board members are set out in schedule 1, which also requires education authorities to prepare detailed schemes for election procedures locally for approval by the Secretary of State. Once again, we will discuss these measures with education authorities and others, and issue guidance that will help authorities to produce sensible schemes while leaving room for appropriate local variations.

We have given particular attention to the concerns expressed during the consultative process about election proceedures. The Bill requires a secret ballot with provision for postal voting for parent members. There will be an opportunity for parental candidates to circulate information about themselves. Half of the parent members will leave office every two years. These provisions, coupled with the requirement that the board should report to and be answerable to parents at open meetings, will ensure that the boards are accountable and representative.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Will the Secretary of State advise the House what assessment has been made of the costing of such elections?

Mr. Rifkind: I cannot give a figure for the elections, but the overall provisions of the Bill will represent a tiny fraction—probably less than 0·5 per cent.—of local authority education expenditure. We have indicated that if education authorities wish to argue for account to be taken of that we will listen carefully to their representations about it. I remind the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) that some savings will be derived from the ending of school councils. A few education authorities already have similar introductory schemes.

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): The Secretary of State's figure of 0·5 per cent. is interesting. It suggests that an authority such as that in Fife where I come from will be spending £500,000 a year to service this amount.

Mr. Rifkind: The estimated figure of £5 million for the whole of Scotland is not just for elections, but for all the functions of school boards, and the costs associated with them. I am aware that COSLA has made a higher estimate, but it does not appear to have taken account of savings on the ending of school councils. There are presumably administration and travel expenses in connection with the operation of school councils in various parts of Scotland. Because of those factors, there will be savings to the authorities.

Mr. Darling: I served on three school councils over six years, as well as being a member of the education committee in Lothian region. Administrative savings will be minimal. In the case of Lothian, it withdrew all the backing under the Conservative regime. These school boards will cost money. If the scheme is going to work properly, along the lines of the Bill, and if the boards are to be serviced properly and given information, that will cost substantially more than the right hon. and learned Gentleman thinks.

Mr. Rifkind: I accept that it will cost. We have said that it will cost approximately £5 million.

Mr. Douglas: This is not a partisan point, but we have all received a letter from Dumfries and Galloway regional council which says that, from the estimates produced for that region, in September 1987, a more realistic estimate for the whole of Scotland would be nearer £20 million. How does the right hon. and learned Gentleman reply to that?

Mr. Rifkind: We shall need to examine the exact basis on which the figures were produced. We believe that they are unnecessarily excessive, and will not be the appropriate ones.

Clauses 8 to 14 give the boards their basic functions, responsibilities and powers. Principally these provisions give boards rights to information and to make representations about the running of their schools. This is a cardinal feature of the Bill. One point on which there seems to have been no dispute is that parents need much more information about the educational process in schools. This is in the interests of the process itself. It makes for better education.

Parents have a right and a need to be thoroughly informed about all aspects of the running of the school. They have an obvious interest in teaching methods and the curriculum. There is ample evidence from correspondence that I receive, as no doubt do other hon. Members, of a keen interest in the details of financial provisions for schools.

The boards are also given rights to involvement in the appointment of senior staff at their schools. These provisions give a coherent national structure to such appointments for the first time. The detail of the provisions is given in schedule 2, which attempts to extend and develop existing best practice in different regions across Scotland.

We also believe it is right that boards should have the scope to take on more responsibility for their schools. As they become familiar with what is involved in running a school, some boards will very likely want to take a greater hand in it themselves. We see no reason why they should not do so within reasonable limits. Equally we do not see any need to force the pace. We expect that there will be a natural evolution. Accordingly, clauses 15 and 16 and schedule 3 deal with the delegation of additional functions to boards. Broadly speaking, additional functions may be delegated either by agreement between the board and its authority, or by the board seeking the approval of the Secretary of State, if its authority does not agree to delegation. However, before appealing to the Secretary of State, the board must have the support of the majority of parents in a ballot on the principle of proposed delegation.

The House may be interested in the sort of functions that a board might obtain if it had the approval of parents as a whole. I can give examples, which are not meant to be an exhaustive list. It could seek powers over the responsibility for selecting staff below the level of assistant head teacher. It could seek responsibility for charging for the use of school premises out of hours, or for maintenance of school premises. It could seek responsibility for discipline and school rules, and for associated matters, and for determining the format of reports to parents. Most importantly, a board could seek the responsibility, if it so wished, for all matters covered by the running cost budget for a school. Clearly that power would give a board the kind of overall responsibility for finance that is permissible under the Bill. In each of those cases, it would arise only where the school board wished to exercise such powers. If the education authority disagreed the board would need the direct endorsement of the parents as a whole.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What thought has been given by the Scottish Office to a situation where a member of the senior staff may feel that his career has been injured and therefore gets involved in legal proceedings? Will the make-up of school boards not change in their very nature? As the Secretary of State knows very well, legal proceedings can continue for a long time. What thought has been given to this sort of endless legal wrangling that may happen from time to time? Has the Scottish Office considered that point?

Mr. Rifkind: That matter does not arise because, as the Bill makes clear, questions of employment or dismissal of a member of the teaching staff remain the responsibility of the education authority rather than the school board. Such a problem is resolved in that way.

Mr. Dalyell: Can the Minister clarify precisely what the relations are between the senior staff and the school boards to which he has referred?

Mr. Rifkind: If the hon. Gentleman reads the Bill, he will find that the role of school boards will be to share in the appointment of the head teacher, the deputy or assistant head teacher, and to have a potential veto on the contents of the short leet. Appointment would not be the responsibility of the school board, but provided for in the manner set out in the Bill.

Mr. Buchan *rose*——

Mr. Rifkind: There will be many opportunities for hon. Gentlemen to make their views known this evening and during the Committee stage.

It is significant that during my remarks hon. Members opposite have been primarily concerned not with the principle of the Bill but with a series of details. Hon. Gentlemen have been perfectly proper in raising many of these details, yet one is bound to ask, in the light of that approach, why they are seeking to decline to give a Second Reading to the Bill.

As we are now well aware, the Bill has been endorsed by the Scottish Parent–Teacher Council. Indeed, on 8 April it wrote to hon. Members saying that the council welcomed the broad content and aims of the proposals. They reiterate that they are broadly in agreement with the provisions of the Bill.

We know that the Educational Institute of Scotland and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities expressed considerable agreement with the proposals that have emerged from the consultative process. I recollect that the presentation by the hon. Gentleman's own party said as follows. I quote from the response of the Scottish council of the Labour party to the consultation document. In the light of what I am about to read, it is extraordinary that hon. Gentlemen appear to intend to divide the House at 10 o'clock this evening. It says:

"The Labour Party strongly supports the increasing involvement of parents in the education of their children."

It then goes on, later in the document, to explain,

[Mr. Rifkind]

"because we are committed to develop the full education potential of all children in Scotland, and the school councils provide an excellent mechanism for involving parents in the democratic control of their children's education."

It goes on:

"However, although the establishment of school councils has been a major step in the right direction, much more needs to be done"—

these are the views of the Labour party—

"in order that they might reach their full potential. We must ensure, for instance, that parent participation is genuine rather than token".

It then says:

"While teachers"—

this is the best part in the light of hon. Members' opposition to this Bill—

"and other professionals have a valuable role to play in councils, they should not have the controlling interests."

In other words, the parents should have real executive powers when it comes to matters of this kind.

But perhaps I have discovered the real reason why Opposition Members will divide the House this evening. It is quite clear, even before the hon. Member for Garscadden has said a word, because he has already given the public his view on the Bill now before the House. He claimed in the *Glasgow Herald* of 19 January that the consultative process has been so complete that

"Labour might have to propose changes to the Bill to ensure a greater role for parents."

Now we know the real explanation. It is the Government's timidity that has upset and infuriated the Labour party. Labour Members will divide the House because we have not gone far enough. Nor was this just the view of the hon. Member for Springburn; it turns out that he was speaking on behalf of his colleagues as a whole. He believes that this Bill is timid and inadequate, a small step for mankind but a very weak step when it comes to the need of parents.

So I am willing to listen with every intention of responding constructively to all the amendments that we will get from the hon. Member for Garscadden to extend the role of parents under this Bill, to the many increased powers for school boards that Opposition Members doubtless wish to put before the House and the Committee. If that is the basis on which the hon. Member wishes to divide the House, perhaps he does speak for Scottish parents. If not, he certainly does not.

5.1 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I beg to move, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"this House declines to give a Second Reading to a Bill which pays only lip service to the genuine need to encourage parental involvement in Scotland's schools, will divide parents and teachers, has been rejected by educational opinion and has now been revealed as a paving measure for alien and irrelevant plans to allow schools to opt out of the public sector, which can only damage the proud and distinctive educational tradition in Scotland."

As the Secretary of State has pointed out, we had a debate on Scottish education on 21 March in the Scottish Grand Committee. The Secretary of State did not speak on that occasion. He has done so this evening, not, I think, with very great profit for the debate. But I concede that he has clearly enjoyed himself, and I am never one to disapprove of enjoyment. I am not enough of a Presbyterian for that.

Three weeks ago the debate centred largely on the Bill that we are discussing tonight, but, of course, a great deal has happened since then. Perhaps I can start by clearing that out of the way. The publication of certain correspondence between the private office of the Prime Minister and the private office of the Secretary of State was important because it made it clear that this Bill no longer stands alone: it is apparently envisaged as a staging post to some strange brand of fundamentalism, some educational theory, which I at least thought extinct. What became clear from that correspondence—and the Secretary of State has danced around the point—is that further legislation is contemplated which is likely to contain provision for schools to opt out of the local authority system. It revealed a squalid little plot which was spelt out in some detail, although one would not have thought so from the speech that the Secretary of State has just made. The opting out was presented not as some sort of possibility but as a decision that had been taken.

We were told—I quote from the *Glasgow Herald* of 30 March—

"The Prime Minister agrees, too, that the Government's future policy should be spelled out in response to the Amendment which Allan Stewart is expected to put down to this session's School Boards (Scotland) Bill. Your Secretary of State will no doubt wish to ensure that Mr. Stewart does indeed table a suitable amendment which could prompt the Secretary of State's statement about future policy."

"Your Secretary of State will no doubt ensure"

is an invitation apparently not to be gainsaid. It sounds like Queen Victoria addressing a recalcitrant lady-in-waiting: any backsliding would leave the lady anything but amused. It is a case of "the Prime Minister expects and the Secretary of State accepts." It is a case, I am afraid, of the right and learned Gentleman swallowing his pride and the Prime Minister's theories.

It would be a tragedy—and I say this to the Secretary of State in considered terms—if Scottish education were put at risk because the Prime Minister insisted in involving herself in areas of policy about which she has neither knowledge nor sympathy. At one level it is very easy to see the Prime Minister's correspondence as the actions of a busybody, but the danger is that she has the power to damage and to destroy. If these plans were to go ahead in the way advertised in that correspondence, I believe that there would be damage to and destruction of our educational traditions.

Since the news broke, the public relations machine has been in full cry, and we have seen evidence of it in the speech written for the Secretary of State for this debate. The facts have been re-presented and re-interpreted to blur and distort what is happening. We really want some answers. We have had a partial answer, but I want to make sure that we know exactly what the Secretary of State's mind is. We would also like to know whether, on this occasion, he jumped or was pushed. What is the Government's final position?

The Secretary of State's first line of defence, as I understand it, is to ask why we are all getting excited about the Prime Minister's letters because there is no change of policy, and this has always been his position from the very beginning. I quote again, since it seems to be a respectable authority—the Minister used it himself—from the *Glasgow Herald* of 1 April:

"Scottish Secretary Mr. Malcolm Rifkind summoned journalists to his headquarters in London"—

an interesting turn of phrase—

"to tell them there was 'total harmony' between himself, the Prime Minister and the Scottish Education Minister".

It is indeed a pretty picture. I am perfectly prepared to believe that there is harmony between the Scottish Education Minister and the Prime Minister. I must confess that I had thought better of the Secretary of State—but I am constantly reviewing my opinion of him as time goes on. In any event, there is alleged to be total harmony. I do not believe it. I believe that there is an element of deception in the suggestion that at no time have the Government argued a different case. I quote from the opting-out statement that the Secretary of State produced through the Scottish information office on 31 March 1988. We are told:

"The Government has also made clear, all along, that we do not rule out provision for opting-out in the future."

I must confess that I had not appreciated that. If they made it clear all along, they did not make it clear to me, to my colleagues, to the Scottish press or to Scottish public opinion—and that is quite clear from the reaction to the publication of the Prime Minister's correspondence. From the very first press conference in August 1987 to launch the discussion document, both the Scottish papers which report it in detail, the *Glasgow Herald* and *The Scotsman*, made the specific point that the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), made it clear that opting out was not on the agenda. While it may almost have stuck in the hon. Member's gullet, given his views, we took it as an honest statement of the Government's policy; so it is rather discreditable that we now discover a very different situation.

The exchanges at Question Time and in the Scottish Grand Committee on 21 March did nothing to remove our misapprehension. Of course, the hon. Member for Stirling said that opting out would go back on the agenda only if there was "real and substantial" evidence of support, and, if there was, they would not stand in its way. There is an example of leadership—they would not stand in its way. But it is a position that is totally incompatible with the conspiracy with the Prime Minister, where a decision had been taken and where there were even quite complicated arrangements to unveil it when the time seemed appropriate. It is dishonest to suggest that the public position could be equated with what was being said in private until those documents were leaked, and I do not think that it reflects any credit on the Secretary of State that he should try and maintain an untenable position in this way. He should have some respect for his reputation.

I want to find out from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary—I accept that on this occasion it will be the second fiddle who will reply, but no doubt he can speak for the Government—exactly what the position is. Again, I take the Secretary of State's statement of 31 March, when he said:

"The current position is that the Scottish Education Department, at my request, is considering what would be required if such a provision was to be considered appropriate in a future Bill. Whether such a provision will be made will be determined in the light of such evidence as may be forthcoming of an interest in a right of opting-out amongst Scottish parents and others with an interest in education."

That might seem to be a satisfactory state of affairs, except that it makes it perfectly clear that, rather than waiting for a demand, which I believe would never have come, and then not standing in its way, the Scottish Office, on the Secretary of State's instructions, is now looking at how this proposition can be formulated and put in statutory form. It is not, it seems to me, a situation that we can allow to rest, and it is certainly one which requires some further elucidation.

I emphasise the fact that, even if that is the present situation, it is totally incompatible with what the Prime Minister said in her letter to the Secretary of State's office in March, which, I remind the House, was as follows:

"The Prime Minister is glad that your Secretary of State is now going to develop, for inclusion in next session's Scottish Education Bill, a scheme whereby schools in Scotland can opt out of local authority control."

There is no question there of the possible legislative form in case at some future date it might possibly happen. It is quite clear in that letter that the Prime Minister is accepting and agreeing and congratulating the Secretary of State on his, no doubt, cave-in on this issue. It appears on the face of that correspondence that the decision has been taken.

The Prime Minister then went on to talk about the amendment of the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) that the Secretary of State would ensure went down and how the fait accompli would then be announced. It is dishonest for the Secretary of State, if that correspondence means anything in common English, to put together this smokescreen which he is now producing and behind which he is sheltering, because he knows that there is no broad stratum of public opinion in Scotland in favour of this proposal. There may be individuals and there may be special circumstances, but there is no broad stratum of opinion in favour of this proposition. I believe that it ought now to be killed stone dead by Ministers and everyone else.

I ask the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, when he replies, to address himself specifically to the question whether the decision, which was clearly contained in the Prime Minister's correspondence, has now been rescinded. Is the Scottish Office now saying that there is no decision, and will it hold to that? *[Interruption.]* I am being encouraged by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), perfectly fairly, to invite the Secretary of State to intervene and say whether the quite clear arrangement contained in the Prime Minister's correspondence has now been abandoned. Perhaps he could say that quite categorically.—[AN HON. MEMBER: "Come on, answer."] The Secretary of State will not rise. Perhaps during the course of the rest of this debate he and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary will consider that question and give us an answer.

I also ask the Parliamentary Under-Secretary to say a word or two about how he assesses the support for this proposition at the stage at which he is thinking of legislation, because that is extraordinarily important. It is doubly important in view of the extraordinary argument that the Secretary of State advanced in connection with the school boards which are to be set up under the legislation that we are considering. He said, with approval, that he endorsed the views of Lord Palmerston. The Palmerston principle—very appropriately, given the views of the Government generally—is apparently considered a good rule for Scottish education. Lord Palmerston, I must say, would be absolutely astonished.

Mr. Rifkind: A Gatling gun!

Mr. Dewar: No, not a Gatling gun; a gunboat, as the Secretary of State may remember.

[Mr. Dewar]

The Palmerston principle is something that we may joke about, but it is not funny in the context of the opting out argument, because the Palmerston principle, enunciated with approval by the Secretary of State, is that if people do not want something, one gives it to them anyway. If that is going to be the ruling principle, what is the value of all these assurances, over which the Parliamentary Under-Secretary is sniggering, about public consultation and support on this issue? I have been left with the impression over this whole sorry and unhappy story that the Secretary of State is no longer master in Dover house and no longer sets the tone for Scottish education policy generally. It is not a good thing and it is something that he should consider with some care.

I noticed in the correspondence, as reported in the papers, that it was said that the Prime Minister

"would like to talk to your Secretary of State about all this after Easter."

I do not know whether those talks have taken place, but, if they have, we shall want to know what happened. We expect a very early announcement that on this occasion the right hon. and learned Gentleman has been able to stand up to the Prime Minister and scupper the whole crazy scheme. It is something that I believe to be very important.

Mr. Bill Walker: The hon. Gentleman has made much of the Prime Minister's interest and said that in his opinion she has little knowledge of Scotland. Perhaps he could advise the House how that equates with the position of the leader of his party, who obviously thinks that the Himalayas are in Scotland.

Mr. Dewar: I doubt it, but the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) is no doubt entitled to his delusions. He will be one of a very good crop.

I do not think that it is right to say that the Prime Minister takes an interest in Scottish education. That is a remarkable euphemism; indeed, it is the prize euphemism of the week.

It is important that the Secretary of State takes these matters seriously. I notice that in an article on 1 April in the *Glasgow Herald,* Mr. Geoffrey Parkhouse, in reviewing the right hon. and learned Gentleman's career, described him as

"The brilliant . . . schoolboy, the accomplished advocate, the assiduous ministerial technician".

This was all high praise in a certain sense, but it is interesting that there was nothing about principle or conviction. When one is looking at education policy, a little bit of principle, a little bit of conviction and perhaps even a little bit of backbone in dealing with the Prime Minister would be very welcome indeed.

Six years ago—I concede that it is not immediate—the right hon. and learned Gentleman very becomingly said that he was ambitious,

"but in a wholly pleasant and delightful way."

The Secretary of State was talking about rosy delusions in his speech. I think that that really takes the biscuit and I would merely enter my dissent and pass on. Maybe the problem with the right hon. and learned Gentleman is that ambition, however pleasant and delightful, is the key. I would like to see some respect for Scottish educational tradition and a willingness to stand up against the vandalism which I think is revealed in the Prime Minister's correspondence.

Turning now to the Bill—these matters are very closely related, for reasons that I will now explain—looking at all the talk about consultation, which is supposed to be the safeguard on the opting-out provision, and considering the school boards' history, I believe that we are entitled to express a good deal of cynicism. The plans were set out, there was a volley of criticism, there was unanimous condemnation from educational, public and parental opinion. Yet, implausible though it may seem to you, Madam Deputy Speaker—or perhaps that is dragging you in in a way that I should not—implausible as it may seem to many people, the Scottish Office team turned up as reasonable men. They announced that consultation, if it was not to become the mark of the Administration, was at least going to be the strategy of the moment.

It always had about it the smack of expediency, and, of course, what we got very quickly was the retreat that is now included in the present legislation. Early on there were signs of regression and the incurable recidivism of the hon. Member for Stirling on educational matters. That has been confirmed by the threat of opting out which is now presented to us. It is prophetic that *The Scotsman*, in a leader on 13 August 1987 on the proposals in the original discussion document, said:

"If implemented in their present form, they will bring the Scottish system to the beginning of the road on which its English counterpart has already started and which ends with individual establishments being able to opt out of the state structure."

The leader went on to comment upon the social division which lay at the heart of that scheme.

We must try to take the whole argument seriously, despite the laughter on the Government Front Bench. We must recognise that opting out, for example, would damage Scottish education, fragment provision and make it more difficult to give opportunity to all children across the educational and social range. It may be quoted against me as a concession, but I have no doubt that the Conservative party may be able to instance well organised and probably fairly prosperous groups who might be tempted by the option, but the tragedy is that it opens the door to selection and reinforces social and educational division. It is dishonest to keep it on the statute book and to pretend that it will lie dormant because it is unpopular. Government policy or circumstance can create conditions where the option of last resort becomes attractive for small, unrepresentative groupings, despite the impact on other children and on provision for other schools in the area. We have a duty to stand against that.

The Bill, as drafted, is unsatisfactory. The Secretary of State conceded that no one dissents from the need for more parental involvement in schools and for parents to take an interest, to show concern and to be able to influence educational matters. I do not believe that the Bill achieves that in a sensible and balanced fashion. The Minister may say that in that case we should nod it through on Second Reading and reform it in Committee. Harsh experience has taught us that that would be a vain chase. In any event, the Bill is fundamentally misconceived in many important ways. I will instance one or two, although clearly much will have to be kept for Committee, if the Bill gets a Second Reading.

We are concerned about the built-in parental majority; that is not to make an anti-parent point. I was interested to hear the Secretary of State concede that there was a certain conflict of interest in a school which was built on

the assumption that one interest should be put in a dominating position, with its word prevailing. I do not believe that anyone should have a controlling interest or that it is proper to think about a conflict of concern or interest. There should be a partnership of pupils, parents and community, which is not represented in the arrangements that we are considering.

There seems to be a power play approach which is seen in the arrangements for the appointment of head teachers. On the appointment committee 50 per cent. of the members will be from the local education authority and 50 per cent. from the school board, but from the parents only and not from the community or any other element represented on the board. Under schedule 2(11), the right to add to or subtract from the short list will be confined to the parents on the school board. To their great credit, the vast majority of the parents to whom I have spoken and who have responded to the discussion paper do not want that to be built in and would support our reservations.

Expenditure on books and material, which is covered by clause 9, is very important for curriculum development within a school, Again, most people would not want the strange conditions in which the head teacher proposes and the board approves, but both must have regard to the advice offered by the local education authority. It seems to be a funny way of ensuring—I quote the Government's pamphlet—

"that the initiative on expenditure . . . lies with professional staff".

In a narrow, semantic sense I do not think that initiative should be used in that way. It will be a recipe for conflict and difficulty, and I am not sure that the Government have got that right either.

On the delegation orders, as I said in the Scottish Grand Committee, if there is a disagreement, where the local education authority has not given consent and the matter goes to the Secretary of State, schedule 3(12) says:

"he shall, after considering the views of the education authority and of the School Board, unless he is satisfied that the delegation requested would prejudice the good running of the school, direct the education authority concerned to make forthwith a delegation order".

It is a narrow and weighted consideration. It makes it extremely difficult to listen to the advice offered by the local education authority, although there is a statutory duty to consult. Again, it is symptomatic of the way in which the scheme has been put together.

I shall want to read the Secretary of State's speech with care, but I was anything but reassured by the examples of power given by the Secretary of State which might be sought under delegation orders. He suggested the running cost budget of the school and its control and the appointment of staff under the grade of assistant head teacher. That sounds to me very much like the ceiling proposals being smuggled in by the back door, using machinery that is weighted to create exactly that situation and to put in place a series of proposals from which the Government have, nominally only, been driven by the weight of public anger. Again, we are entitled to make the point that we will return to it.

In the Government's own words:

"Boards are not intended to usurp the position of the headteacher . . . The boards will enhance the authority of headteachers . . . The fact that headteachers will not vote on their boards is intended to reflect their special status".

That is sophistry. Their special status is to make sure that they have no vote and therefore, presumably, less influence. The Government document continues:

"in an extreme case, a headteacher might need to distance him or herself from a board decision which was professionally objectionable."

What decision does the hon. Member for Stirling envisage which is professionally objectionable and from which a headmaster might want to distance himself? Is that a sensible way of going about the business of introducing proper and controlled parental influence?

Mr. Rifkind: Before the hon. Gentleman criticises the Government for not proposing that head teachers should have the right to vote on school boards, he might like at least to consult the representations made by the two head teacher associations for primary and secondary schools. If he did, he would find that they made clear their view that they did not want a right to vote, for reasons which the Government accepted.

Mr. Dewar: That is a fair point, and that opinion must be taken seriously. I would not for a moment deny that. We have received a wide range of recommendations on this and other points. If we were to carry out a head count, I think that it would come out on our side. Certainly I give the Secretary of State my word that, despite the hypocrisy of the language which I have just read out, I am prepared to consider those representations carefully, although I do not think that they have reached me. Of course, they should be considered and weighed in the balance.

Mr. Dalyell: May I ask my hon. Friend's forgiveness for interrupting him? I do not normally interrupt the Opposition Front Bench. I tried to get the reaction of the Educational Institute of Scotland, and particularly its lawyers, to the Secretary of State's answer on the legal position of head teachers. Is it not clear that teachers may be involved legally in relation to the boards, whether the Government like it or not? In some circumstances, teachers may come for redress.

Mr. Dewar: I would have to examine that point carefully. The Secretary of State probably has one fair argument, which is that the employing authority under the Bill will remain the local education authority, although it is unfortunate that the education authority will be liable for what the school board, which it does not control and influence, does and it will have to carry the legal can for the board's actions. That is an unsafe, unsound and unsatisfactory legal position.

No doubt my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) will have realised that if we were to go down the road of opting out, the position would immediately change because the board of the opted-out school would become the employing authority. The position then would be exactly as my hon. Friend fears.

I will not make much of it at this stage, but the financial implications are much more serious than the £5 million about which the Secretary of State talked. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West, I got a letter from Mrs. Elizabeth Smith, who chairs the education committee of Dumfries and Galloway regional council and is, I hope, a friend of the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro). It is her view that £20 million is a much more realistic figure. I hope that the hon. Member for Dumfries will reflect on that if he serves—and I joke—on the Committee that examines the Bill.

What we have here is an unbalanced system. Of course, the objective is desirable, but the means are wrong and the House should take that into account. It is also an unstable

[Mr. Dewar]

system. Clause 15 describes what cannot be the subject of delegation orders, which looks fine until one listens to the Secretary of State giving his examples and suggestions of what might come under that heading. If we go down the road of opting out we shall have a Government who smash their own safeguards as they build a new educational world in "her" image—which no one in Scotland wants.

I am not ashamed to say, and do not apologise for saying, that it would not be right to give a Second Reading to a Bill that is so fundamentally flawed. Indeed, we have made that clear. It is based on a dangerous heresy: that education is merely a commodity to be bought and sold in the market. As has already been mentioned in an intervention, there was a revealing passage in the Scottish Grand Committee on 21 March. I understand the ingenuity of the argument. The Minister is saying that the middle, upper and prosperous classes can use their cheque books to opt out and buy educational privilege and this is an attempt to extend that privilege to other people. I understand but reject that argument. The phrase was used with such venom by the Minister that it is clear that he is very thirled to the concept of a market for education. If people do not like the model they should move on and fragment the system, going for short-term and sometimes, I fear, selfish options, irrespective of their effect on educational opportunity for other children in the community. I am sure that the exercise of preference by the cheque book is symptomatic of that approach and lies behind the way in which the Bill has been drawn up.

Let us have choice, but not through the cheque book; let us recognise that we must move away from that narrow and offensive vision. Education is not a matter of purchasing power of any sort, nor is it a commercial transaction; it is a partnership between teachers, pupils, parents and the community—common interests co-operating in a common cause. People such as the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, who now calls the tune in the Scottish Office, are the enemies of this common cause and ultimately the enemies of what is in the interests of the vast majority of children in our communities. The Tory approach is fundamentally misconceived, unpopular and unwanted.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is, I think, in the middle of his peroration, so I am grateful to him for allowing me to interrupt. He knows that the Scottish Parent-Teacher Council has welcomed the Bill. It is the most representative body of Scottish parents. We know that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Educational Institute of Scotland and others have said that they accept and welcome the idea of a school board for each school in Scotland. The Opposition have said that they are in favour of school boards. They think there should be not only lip service to parental involvement, but a real role for parents.

Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the points he has raised, albeit important, are essentially matters of detail for Committee? He has not yet explained how he can justify voting against the principle of the Bill, which is that each school in Scotland should have a school board consisting of parents, teachers and co-opted members. Is he against that? If not, why is he against the Bill?

Mr. Dewar: We have repeatedly made it clear that we are in favour of reform. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is correct to say that the present school councils have not lived up to expectations or operated in a way that is seen as satisfactory. I endorse some things in the Bill, such as the idea of having a body involving parents that is based upon an individual school, rather than the groupings of the old system. That is a move in the right direction.

If the Government withdraw the Bill and bring forward, after consultation—*[Interruption.]* The Bill is fundamentally flawed. The Secretary of State is smiling disingenuously in a vain attempt to make himself human. He is asking me to believe that he will approach the Committee stage with an open mind and listen to public and educational opinion, and accept the amendments that people want. I would certainly be interested in considering that proposition, but that is not the position.

I do the right hon. and learned Gentleman the credit of thinking that he is labouring under a genuine misunderstanding. If he thinks that the EIS—I take one organisation with which I have had a great deal of contact over the past week or two—wants the Bill to be given a Second Reading, he is in cloud-cuckoo-land—*[Interruption.]* That is not what motivates me. The Secretary of State asks me to pay attention to the views of the head teachers' associations. Yet, when I say that I pay some attention to the biggest teachers' union in Scotland, he laughs at me. He should think before doing that sort of thing.

There is no support for the Bill, because it edges back towards what was wholly unacceptable. The Secretary of State will recall that there were 7,600 representations on his original discussion paper. Fifty-nine per cent. were analysed in some detail and the proposals were endorsed by marginally more than 1 per cent. of those who bothered to respond. With reservations, 3·4 per cent. agreed with them; 88 per cent. condemned, disagreed with or dissented from them. Parental sources provided 70 per cent. of the example—only 11 per cent. were teachers. If the Secretary of State wants to argue the case of popular consent, therefore, it is entirely on our side.

I must end, because the Front Benches have been in possession of the debate for too long. There has been a resounding vote of no confidence in the original proposals and in these proposals and in the approach behind them. We were recently favoured with a quotation from an impeccable source, uttered during the Scottish Grand Committee debate. It is a serious description of Conservative education policy:

"The job of Scottish Education Minister has been rightly described as the poisoned chalice of Scottish politics. My hon. Friend has wisely not drunk of it, but has hurled it across the room and told the waiter that his job is now open to competitive tender."—[*Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 21 March 1988; c. 19.]

That is a tremendous statement on Scottish education policy under this Government, made in a speech by the hon. Member for Eastwood, who is now laughing in an embarrassed way. I am happy to accept that it is a fair comment from a believer. After all, the hon. Gentleman is the cutting edge of the new vandalism, the Prime Minister's chosen vehicle for bringing the bad news from Eastwood to the people of Scotland. If that is what education is about, we are right, to answer the Secretary of State's question, to vote against the Bill because, as we say in the amendment, it will

"divide parents and teachers, has been rejected by educational opinion and has now been revealed as a paving measure for alien and irrelevant plans to allow schools to opt out of the public sector."

Every one of those words is justified by what has been said in the debate and by what has happened in the past few months. We do not need the eccentricities of the hon. Member for Eastwood; we need only look at what Ministers are saying and doing to find every possible justification for being in the No Lobby tonight.

5.38 pm

Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith (Kincardine and Deeside): I confess that I was left thoroughly puzzled by the speech by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and some of the questions asked by Opposition Members in the course of the debate.

The hon. Member for Garscadden ended by referring to the EIS and the analysis of the representations that were received as a result of the thorough consultation process that took place on the Bill. Everyone has admitted that consultation on the original proposals was thorough. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the analysis of the response to the consultation process referred to the consultation paper. One would think from what he said that no changes had taken place. The Bill before us is completely different from the original proposals, and I welcome that.

I am puzzled by what the hon. Gentleman said and even more puzzled about two aspects of his amendment. The amendment

"declines to give a Second Reading to a Bill which pays only lip service to the genuine need to encourage parental involvement".

The hon. Gentleman's criticisms of the Bill are that we are going too far in terms of parental involvement and would make it too effective. He has said nothing about his alternatives or about a better form of parental involvement which he thinks is necessary if the objectives are to be achieved. It is not the Government but the hon. Gentleman and his party who are paying lip service to parental involvement.

The third point on which I am genuinely puzzled relates to the attitude of the Opposition to opt out. I share the hon. Gentleman's views about opt-out in Scotland and have made that abundantly clear on many occasions. I agree that there has been confusion. I have been confused by the letters that have been bandied about. I am prepared to rest on what my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister has said. He has made clear that opting out is not part of the Bill. My right hon. and learned Friend certainly made clear to me, and no doubt the Minister who is winding up will confirm, that it is quite clearly the Government's intention during discussion of the Bill to reject approaches about opting out. My right hon. and learned Friend was right to try to clarify that.

To spend so much of the debate on the question of opting out is quite simply a smokescreen by the Opposition. We should concentrate on the debate in hand and look forward to the Committee stage. The Bill is about greater and more effective parental involvement and my right hon. and learned Friend is certainly paying more than lip service to that. I am much more confused about the Opposition's reasons for opposing the Bill than about some of the other matters that I will raise.

The original proposals put forward in August contained great inherent dangers to the education system in Scotland and to our schools, not just in education terms but in simple management terms. The original proposals contained an entirely mixed management system for our schools with education authorities on the one hand and boards dominated by parents on the other. They would have shared different executive functions and the most crucial individual executive function, that of the head teacher, was lost somewhere in the middle. In terms of simple management and executive authority and accountability the original proposals were inherently unsound. I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals because they are fundamentally different from those that were made originally. I welcome the modifications now contained in the Bill.

My right hon. and learned Friend was perhaps a little ungracious in his lack of tribute to those areas of Scotland where school councils have worked well. He acknowledged that in some limited cases and in areas such as Grampian they have worked fairly well as a general system and not just as a good council standing out against others. I support the Bill because it builds on the present system of school councils that work well rather than grafting on a system containing the kind of dangers that I mentioned.

Equally one must acknowledge that even where school councils have worked fairly well I know of a sense of frustration on the part of some members of such councils. Sometimes an education authority or a head teacher has felt that they were not able to participate as much as they would like in the affairs of a school. That applies more strongly in areas where education authorities did not encourage the setting up of school councils or did not allow them to be effective. The Bill meets that criticism. I welcome the principle of the Bill.

The hon. Member for Garscadden raised points about the Bill that are Committee points. He did the same thing during the debate on the Housing (Scotland) Bill. I should like to probe some of the matters that he raised but, as I have said, they are Committee points and do not give any fundamental or sound reason for opposing the Bill in principle.

I should like to pose one or two questions to the Minister who will be winding up and I hope that he will answer them. I should like him to say a little more about the role of the school boards and their relationship to the existing college councils. Where community schools and college councils exist we have seen much greater integration of our secondary school education system and community education in the areas served by such secondary schools. We have some community schools in Grampian and the college council system has worked well. Parents, teachers and those who serve on the councils are generally happy with the way that they have worked, but there is genuine anxiety about how integration of the new boards system will fit in with community education generally and with community schools in particular. We want more clarification and reassurance on that.

My second point is one that I made in my submission on the consultation paper. We have to look much more closely at some form of co-ordination between the different boards of primary schools that are feeding to the same secondary school. We must keep a very close link between the secondary school and the primary schools that are feeding to it. If we believe in parental involvement, we must ensure that there is some co-ordination between the boards of those primary schools and the board of the secondary school to which the primary schools feed.

[Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith]

My third point is a small one. In some rural areas where schools may qualify, because of numbers on the roll, to have a school board, there may well be a desire for two or three small schools to come together under a joint school board. That could be effective in terms of future parental support and could evolve to the stage where schools had their own board. Perhaps the Minister can tell me whether there will be opportunities for primary schools that are geographically next door to each other to have a joint board.

My last specific question before turning to general points is about costs. I very much share the cynicism expressed about whether the actual cost figures for running the school boards are correct. I want the school boards to be effective, and if they are to be effective there will be administrative costs. That matter must be probed further. When the Minister replies perhaps he will give an undertaking that, if it looks as if this will cost more than anticipated, resources will be forthcoming, but not at the expense of other items on the existing school budget. It would be a shame if that happened.

Finally, I should like to turn to the general aspect of the atmosphere of uncertainty and confusion about opting out. Earlier I made my position clear. Opting out is not appropriate and does not fit in with the development and the historical background of Scottish education. If strong desires for opting out develop in future, they will have to be considered on their merits. My right hon. and learned Friend has said that if this arises it will be debated as a separate issue. For that reason we are wrong to debate it in the Bill.

My right hon. and learned Friend must realise that, over the past few years, Scottish schools have been through one of the most traumatic periods in their existence. We must not forget the upset and the breakdown in relationships between parents, teachers, education authorities and the Government which have left real scars on the school system in Scotland. At the same time, under the Government, we have seen some real advances in education in Scottish schools, for example, the new curriculum and examination system. We must not forget the burden that that places on teachers, education authorities and pupils. We do a disservice to education in Scotland and to the children whom we serve in our schools if we try to impose too many changes too swiftly over too short a time.

In that context, I urge my right hon. and learned Friend to be careful in proceeding, even if there is pressure in respect of such matters as opting out. We need now, more than ever, to consolidate the good improvements made in our system and to have a chance for parents, teachers and education authorities to settle down and get on with the job of teaching. In that way, we shall best serve the interests of education and of the young people in Scotland today and in the future.

5.51 pm

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): I am delighted to be called so early to speak in the debate, first, because one can be listened to and, secondly, because some of the sharpness of the argument has to a large extent been located in my area of Paisley.

I was pleased to listen to the speech of the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith), as we are old sparring partners and he is possibly the last respected member of the Conservative party in Scotland. He is certainly one of the few who have neither been bribed nor cowed by the Prime Minister and, therefore, we listen to him with a certain respect.

I wish to make two points to the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside. First, when he says that he regrets the absence of community school involvement and that we should try to change that, he does not understand the purpose of these school boards. Community school involvement is specifically and deliberately missing. These are specifically school boards with a majority of parents of existing pupils, though making policy for the parents of future children, while the community itself is deliberately excluded. That has implications for all schools in every community and specifically for community schools. Community schools have been one of the great developments in Scottish education and they will suffer as a result of the Bill.

Secondly, the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside misunderstands the purpose and structure of the Bill when he says that he would like to see two or three schools getting together to form a joint school board. This is no longer an advisory grouping. It is not a development of parental or parent-teacher involvement. The Bill aims to create a structure of elected parents who will exercise executive and management functions in a school. There is no question of nice, friendly joint school boards considering education policies in a larger area. If the right hon. Gentleman objects to joint boards being missing and if he now understands that that is the nature of the Bill, I hope that he will join us in the Lobby tonight to oppose the Bill.

Specific problems arise from the Bill, for example, in respect of clause 9(2)(a). That clause contains an extraordinary proposition for teachers and headmasters whose legal duty is to teach and develop schools to their best ability, yet we are told that the headmaster

"shall from time to time make proposals to the School Board as to how the funds provided under this section should be spent".

That refers to the purchase of books and other teaching materials. The clause goes on to say that the headmaster

"shall not spend funds on any proposal unless it is approved by the Board."

Under those provisions, therefore, the board of parents, without the direct involvement of teaching the children and knowing which books, educational techniques and materials are required, and without envisaging curriculum problems, shall determine book by book and article by article what the headmaster may purchase.

I hope that the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside will realise that the functions of the board differ from the concept of an aid or adjunct to involving parents in their children's education. It supersedes the role of headmasters in an executive and educational form. That is why we resist the measure and believe that it has nothing to do with proper parental involvement.

Some fun was made of the Labour party's policy in respect of this matter. I have done a great deal of work on the Labour party's education policy in the past, and community and parental involvement has always been an important part of that policy. The Government's proposals go against the grain of past Scottish education

policy in respect of parental involvement. The Government are trying to impose an alien structure on Scottish education policy, as the Prime Minister has done throughout our nation over the last few years, in place of the parent-teacher association, which has often been weak in the past and should be strengthened. We must pull out of the dominie attitude still existing among some Scottish teachers. Parent-teacher associations should be strengthened and developed.

The Government are seeking to downgrade the role of the individual teacher and parent. They are seeking not wider and more continual parental involvement, but a structure of parental representatives which will manage. That is a different matter. We should get rid of that option. Labour's education policy seeks to involve parents, teachers, the community and the child. There is none of that in the Bill. It is concerned only with the structure of management. As has been said, it should be seen as a paving Bill for the Government's real intention—the right to opt out.

I know that my hon. Friends may be fed up with my referring to schools in Paisley and particularly to Paisley grammar school, but that is central to the argument. The conspiracy between the Prime Minister and the Scottish Office was exposed in the *Glasgow Herald*. Ministers are no longer being asked to consider, but are being ordered by the Prime Minister, to ensure that the amendment of the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) is tabled. The Prime Minister says, "Prod him. Make sure it happens." That is what is being imposed upon us.

That in turn stems from an earlier conspiracy exposed in *The Sunday Times* and involving the editor of *The Sunday Times*, the hon. Member for Eastwood and the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland with responsibility for education, whose behaviour in all this has been despicable. I have just discovered that there was another element in this conspiracy, a familiar figure described in the *Paisley and Renfrewshire Gazette* as

"former MP, solicitor Gerry Malone".

It was said that he

"will also be present to speak to and advise the parents on the next step for them".

That man claimed to be a Member of Parliament, but he was really a Whip. This is a case of the Rake's progress or the Whip's progress. He left the House and is now taking part in this squalid conspiracy to save a school.

I understand why the editor of *The Sunday Times* should do this. He was an old boy and he wanted to come back and boast, "How I 'tapped' Maggie." That was the headline in the *Paisley Daily Express* on 30 January. The article continued, quoting Andrew Neil, the editor of *The Sunday Times*:

"In my job I get to meet a number of people who are senior figures in all political parties. I used people I know in Downing Street to bring the matter to the Prime Minister's attention. . . . She must have had words with Rifkind at the Scottish Office."

As *The Sunday Times* states,

"He got the message."

It is worth reminding ourselves about what has happened when additional elements like Gerry Malone creep into these matters. We are sorry to see him mixed up in this. He played a more honourable role in the Tory Whips' Office. I never thought that I would ever be able to say that.

I must insist that the proposed amendment to be introduced by the hon. Member for Eastwood is all about Paisley grammar. Conservative Members are very indiscreet in their conspiracies. One of the Tories' problems is that they are so arrogant in their custom of ruling that they do not conceal their conspiracies very well.

The hon. Member for Eastwood sent me a letter in which he exposes the nature of the conspiracy. I complained that he was interfering with my kids, parents and constituents. I said that he was interfering from his constituency. He wrote:

"I am in receipt of your letter . . . I must emphasise that I have been very rigorous throughout in making it clear that I was representing my constituents, of whom there is a significant number."

I am glad to know that the hon. Gentleman has a significant number of constituents. I presume that he means that he has a significant number of children of constituents in schools in my constituency. We resent our schools being dictated to from outside our town. The hon. Member for Eastwood continues in his letter:

"Indeed, the whole issue focuses on my constituents since they are by definition Parents Charter pupils who are being deliberately discriminated against."

I would have thought that the pupils in my constituency and in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mr. Adams) were being discriminated against because of the abuse of the parental charter as more than half the children in Paisley grammar come from outside the town and the catchment area.

From what I have described about Paisley you will understand, Madam Deputy Speaker, why we are worried about the opting-out proposals. The hon. Member for Eastwood is concerned about saving Paisley grammar in the opting-out proposals so that, with a majority of parents in his constituency outside the Paisley catchment area, he can determine the nature of a school in our town. That is why we object to the Bill.

If the hon. Member for Eastwood succeeds in his opting-out proposal, will those parents who are to be made responsible for the management of the school be entitled to determine a school's entry policy? If so, there will be an alien school in Paisley. Will that happen? When the hon. Member for Eastwood tables his amendment in Committee, will it include a section stating whether parents will determine which pupils will or will not enter a school? We await a reply from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): The hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) will have to wait for the Committee stage.

Mr. Buchan: That is another reason why we should reject the Bill. The best thing to do with a Bill if we do not trust amendments which might be tabled in Committee is to reject it. We should reject it because it paves the way for opting out. We should reject it also because we do not know how far the amendment to be tabled by the hon. Member for Eastwood will go, and we do not trust the hon. Gentleman on education any more than we trust the Minister on education.

The Government claim that we are against parental choice. We are not. I am in favour of intelligent parental choice. The trouble is that parental choice has not been based on educational purposes or on particular needs; it has been based, on the whole, on the cachet of a particular school. That is apparently happening in Dundee, affecting 2,000 pupils in one school. The inevitable effect is the draining off of another school. A similar thing is happening in Paisley. The newest school building in

[Mr. Buchan]

Paisley, the one school whose future is still under threat despite yesterday's decision, is the only school where disabled pupils can be taught alongside non-disabled pupils because it has the proper facilities, including ramps and lifts, to cope with wheelchair pupils. No other school in the west of Scotland and certainly not in Paisley has such facilities.

We are opposed to the Bill because it will allow the consideration of amendments such as that proposed by the hon. Member for Eastwood. Ministers have rejected some of the voting figures in connection with the proposals in the Bill. However, those figures were massive, with only 1 per cent. in favour of the proposals and 88 per cent. against —even if the vote was taken on earlier proposals. However, the results show a massive rejection of the general propositions.

The arguments for the proposals were equally interesting. There was universal agreement on greater parental involvement with schools and almost total rejection of the proposed means of implementation. The Government have brought in means of implementation to pretend that they are in favour of greater parental involvement in schools. They have reversed the decision. The parents have seen through that and rejected it.

The results of the vote show that parents want involvement, participation and partnership in running schools. They are against having an executive or management role. That view has not changed and the 88 per cent. against the proposals remains solid. The results also show that parents are keenly interested in the welfare of their children. They want parents and teachers to be partners. They trust teachers, but not other parents, to look after their children. That is very important. They see the teacher as an objective provider of their children's education, not as an interested parent. Incidentally, teachers have been trained. We should not forget that and we must listen to them.

We want a partnership of parents, teachers and the community. The widespread feeling is that the proposals are a costly and simplistic approach to a very complex problem. The majority of people believed that it was a mistake to try to produce a rigid system for the whole country. There was also a widespread suspicion that the consultation was a sham and that the Minister intended to go ahead anyway. By God, we have a perceptive population in Scotland. I could not have presented my opposition to the proposals any better after all my years of teaching. The people have got it right.

The proposed amendment has been made for Paisley. Because of the new regulations, fiddled and brought through by the conspiracy, the schools proposals from the region will have to be sent to the Secretary of State. I must be honest and state that I do not agree with the proposals. There should have been four non-denominational schools in Paisley, not three. I welcome the fact that there are two denominational schools. However, the lack of a fourth non-denominational school will cause some concern in the other sector and we shall have to face up to that.

I believe that not having four non-denominational schools was a mistake because the Government will impose four and the fourth will be Paisley grammar. Strathclyde region has been trying to deal with the problems of the distortion and abuse of parental choice to save the best school building in Paisley with the facilities that I have described. With this "wicked Government" —to quote the Bishop of Durham—Strathclyde region may have played into the Government's hands.

I hope that the Government will respond to the request from the convenor of Strathclyde region and meet representatives to discuss the proposals instead of acting in a draconian way—as most of us fear that they will—to produce some solution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North and I have been considering these problems in the interests of the parents, schools and children. We have not been considering the kind of solution proposed by the hon. Member for Eastwood, who claims that he is interested not in the children in Eastwood, but in children who opt to go elsewhere. He claims that those children are the problem and that we must ignore the other kids, even those in his constituency. He claims that the whole problem involves the kids who opt out of his area and that the whole issue focuses on his constituents. The claim made by the hon. Member for Eastwood is not true. The problem does not focus on all his constituents; it focuses only on that powerful minority who choose to send their children to our school.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Of course the whole issue focused on my constituents at Paisley grammar, for one reason, if for no other: no proposals in Strathclyde region currently involve the closure of schools within the Eastwood constituency.

Mr. Buchan: The hon. Gentleman might have brought forward proposals to save the schools in Paisley, rather than endangering them. He might have brought forward proposals to try to ensure that his schools hold pupils rather than export them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North and I have properly faced that problem. We still agree that we would have preferred a four and two situation, but we have not achieved that. We do not believe that it is impossible in an urban area to prevent the misuse by certain parents of parental choice.

How then do we square the democracy of parental choice with preserving comprehensive education in the town? The answer is to form a schools council for Paisley. It should be taken from the four non-denominational schools and its remit would be to try to develop comprehensive education within Paisley while allowing parental choice.

Parents would be able to ask what a school specialised in and the headmaster would, for example, be able to advise on the right school for a person who was keen on languages. In other words, the schools council would co-operate to make sure that parental choice was not merely exploited to the extent that a school's capacity reached 105 per cent. Such a schools council could also allow curriculum exchange between schools, so that choice could be made according to the curriculum, individual interest, and, perhaps, community interest. Parental choice could be exercised, but exercised intelligently in co-operation with teachers, headmasters and parents in Paisley.

The Government should meet Strathclyde council and discuss the situation in Paisley and the decisions that would have to be made and come forward with proposals

that will enable a four and two solution, while still allowing parental choice, and which would put the needs of the children of Paisley first.

If the hon. Member for Eastwood is concerned with the education of his children, he should concentrate on the schools in his area and make sure that they come up to scratch and meet needs, instead of ignoring them as he is at the moment. He is concerned with the small minority of powerful parents who can be served elsewhere.

This is a bad Bill. It is a wicked Bill in its own right. It should be opposed for what it presages and for what it already contains.

6.12 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I do not intend to take up the remarks of the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) about his local school problems. However, my right hon. and hon. Friends must be astonished at the Labour party's opposition to the Bill. The Opposition spend their time talking about their enthusiasm for parental involvement but then try to find some way round the corner to vote against the Bill. Even more astonishing is the fact that, despite the tremendous opposition of the Labour party and the three-line Whip, there has rarely been more than a third of the Labour party present during the debate.

This is an important Bill. I welcome it, not so much for what it may do, but for its repercussions and its effect on future legislation in Scotland. It will rightly be discussed in detail in Committee and it may well set the tone and structure of Scottish education for the remainder of the century. We must make every endeavour to get it right in Committee.

I have always welcomed parental involvement in schools. It is usually a huge success. However, I still wait to be convinced that the willing parents who give tremendous support to their parent-teacher association will also come forward, week by week, in an executive function.

The Scottish Parent-Teacher Council welcomes the Bill, as I do, but I have not yet had a flood of letters from parents showing equal enthusiasm for serving on boards. However, I am sure that, when things are explained to them and they understand the opportunity that they are being given, that will change.

I am not one who believes in sudden change. In education we should move by evolution. By and large, that is what has happened over the past 120 years. We are particularly proud of Scottish education's international reputation, but there are still some aspects on which we remain disappointed.

For my sins—it seems to be an ever-diminishing circle—I was a Minister with responsibility for education in the 1970s. Our problems then were a shortage of teachers and adequate buildings. The jargon at the time was "pupil-teacher ratios" and "roofs over heads". We and subsequent Governments expanded the colleges of education and built flat out within our financial limitations. That policy was carried on by the previous Labour Government. Now we have plenty of teachers——

Mr. Dalyell: I recall that the hon. Gentleman was a most helpful Minister. Will he reflect on the letter on the question of costs that has been sent, very courteously, to all of us by Elizabeth Smith? Does the hon. Gentleman, with his experience, think that the Government are right to put the cost at £5 million, or that Mrs. Smith is right in putting it at £20 million?

Sir Hector Monro: The hon. Gentleman has leapt in long before I intended to deal with the matter of costs and the letter from Mrs. Smith, who is an exceptionally fine chairman of our education authority. However, I shall deal with the matter now. Certainly I share Mrs. Smith's concern. The Bill says in its preamble that costs will be very small. Yet Dumfries and Galloway have done some accurate costing and they insist that there will be about 135 school boards, allowing for a few amalgamations of the small schools, and they cannot see how the cost will be less than £600,000 a year. There is only about £4,000 a board and if one accepts that there will be substantial administrative, travelling and election costs, with teachers having to take time off work during the day, the Government must have grossly underestimated the total cost.

I have seen the costings, and if Dumfries and Galloway are accurate in putting them at £600,000 a year the overall figure of £20 million may be reasonably accurate. I do not want to consider the matter in percentage terms of the total overall cost of the education budget for Scotland, which is enormous, including, as it does, teachers' salaries and so on, but the direct cost on each education authority must be substantial. I ask my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State to look at this matter much more carefully before the Committee stage. If the boards are to carry out their work effectively—if we are to have boards they must be effective—their cost has been under-estimated. I hope that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) realises from those comments that I share his concern about costs.

We now have plenty of teachers and our buildings are in much better shape. However, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) said, we have been going through a fairly traumatic period with curriculum change, the red book, the technical and vocational education initiative, and so on.

Way back in the 1970s there was the Munn and Dunning report and now we are translating that into action, and rightly so, always giving quality of education the top priority. I am glad that we have swung to a more practical form of education so that the pupils of today will be a much more effective and skilled work force of tomorrow.

The 1980 legislation brought forward valuable developments—parental choice and the parents' charter. It was not as effective as I would have liked in rural areas. Time and again we have run into the problem of rural transport. We cannot send children to the schools that the parents wish because the transport is not available. That is another aspect which I hope we shall have the opportunity to discuss in Committee.

I believe that the assisted places scheme was a first class move by the Government, but I said at the time, and I have said once or twice since, that it was a pity that the Secretary of State renounced his right to be involved in school closures except in particular rural areas or for denominational schools. He had an overall independent view to balance between the parents and the education

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authorities such as now seems to be important in regard to Paisley. I believe that setting the balance was often very effective in school closures through the usual system.

We have undergone periods of immense change and disharmony over teachers' salaries and other related aspects. Great credit is due to my right hon. and learned Friend for the way in which he managed to conclude the very difficult dispute over teachers' salaries. This year, we are back to a period of consultation, the White Paper, the Government's conclusions, and now legislation. I pay tremendous credit to my right hon. and learned Friend for listening to the advice on the White Paper that came from all parts of Scotland and from a tremendous cross-section of educational opinion. That is why there have been so many changes from the original White Paper to what is now in the Bill. As my right hon. and learned Friend said, perhaps it really would help if Opposition Members criticised the Bill and not the White Paper that was published last August.

I believe that the Dumfries and Galloway education authority gave an excellent response to the White Paper. It was positive and helpful and indicated that it wanted to move forward far from the ceiling and nearer the floor. That became the jargon expression of last autumn. It is pleased about the Bill in the form in which it seeks a Second Reading today. I said at the time of the White Paper that I would not have been able to support the ceiling proposals. That is why I am glad that we are now discussing much more simple proposals which I have already welcomed in my opening remarks.

We must think carefully about the pace at which we proceed in education development generally. I believe that we are going through a period of educational indigestion at present and that most authorities and teachers want time to think, to develop and to achieve really practical results through all that has changed in the past 10 or 15 years. That can be achieved only through a period of settled policy rather than by the introduction of too much legislation in future. They want to concentrate on the three Rs, discipline and development of character.

I should like more emphasis to be placed on sport and recreation which is very important in character development. That has been lacking in the past two or three years as teachers have not been enthusiastic about working on Saturdays and taking school teams away and so on. I believe that the youngsters in this country want more opportunity to participate in all forms of outward-bound recreation.

We want parental involvement, but there is a world of difference between the work of a parent-teacher association and the regular executive responsibilities envisaged by the Bill. I want to put to my hon. and learned Friend the issue of responsibility. I was first elected a councillor almost too long ago to welcome the thought. As a past councillor, I view the responsibility of an elected councillor in a different colour from those who have not had that experience. Whatever the percentage of a poll in any local council election, a councillor is elected by a majority decision. He or she has the right to play a part in the policy of the education committee and the full council. It is most important that that should not be jeopardised by the views of a school board. After all, the councillors are responsible for expenditure and, from next year, the community charge. They must not be responsible for carrying out the overall education Acts without the power to see that it happens.

In Committee, we will very carefully examine how we can reconcile throw-away words such as consultation, management, policy, and executive decision between the board and the local authority. One can envisage boards making decisions in direct contravention of local authority policy. The Bill states that they must "have regard" to local authority policy, but that is open to all sorts of interpretation. That, too, is an extremely important Committee point.

We must be absolutely certain that we give the community as much opportunity as possible to be involved. By that I mean also the churches. I have always felt that the Catholic Church and therefore Catholic schools must have a particular place in Scottish education and I do not wish to see that diminished in the Bill or in Scottish education generally. I also believe that we underestimate the immense good will and consultation now taking place between education authorities and schools, parents and pupils.

Recently there was a first class example in Dumfries and Galloway. A few years ago a network group was set up —I am afraid that many of us anticipated that it would not be a success—which included Lockerbie academy, Moffat academy and Langholm academy. Over the past 12 months, Langholm and Moffat realised that it was not a success and the parents put forward a very strong case for full secondary status as sixth-year secondary schools. They held meetings with the education authority, and now the authority rightly has decided that there should be three full sixth-year secondary schools. That shows that consultation does work between the authorities and the schools in the areas that they represent. I give great credit to Mrs. Smith, who has been mentioned several times during today's debate, for her constructive approach.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Given the important reservations that he has expressed today about the proposals, may we conclude that the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) will be voting against the Second Reading this evening?

Sir Hector Monro: That is an extraordinary conclusion. Obviously the hon. Member was not present when I began my speech by giving the most warm welcome to the principle of the Bill.

I spoke about costs in some detail in answer to the hon. Member for Linlithgow. I wish to make two final points. The first concerns funds. In the consultation document, my right hon. Friend made it clear that the Bill excluded powers to levy charges and of course that stems from the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. I feel that it should be put in the Bill for the sake of clarification. It is much easier for important issues to be included in clause 18 rather than left out because they are included in another Bill that is now a few years out of date.

Finally, I come to the issue of opting out. Opposition Members have made a tremendous to-do about it. I do not know how often my right hon. and learned Friend has to explain in detail exactly what he meant, how it is not in the Bill, it is not going to be in the Bill and if it is ever brought into operation it would have to be after the most detailed consultation with school boards. We are not setting up school boards until the summer of 1989, so they will have

another year to think about it after that. It will be a long time before opting out can be contemplated. I made it clear throughout the winter, and I do so again now, that I am not in favour of opting out.

There is a very good education structure in Scotland. If certain schools opt out, it will have an impact on all schools, particularly schools for the mentally handicapped and other special schools. If schools are allowed to opt out, those that remain in the public sector will suffer.

I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals. They will result in parents becoming more and more involved in the education of their children. Parents will be able to ensure that their children have the quality of education that they deserve. Apart from the Committee points that I have mentioned, about which I have certain reservations, I warmly welcome the proposals.

6.31 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) and the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) have said why they intend to support the Bill. Their line is, perhaps, predictable, and I think that I could have written their speeches for them. Their point is that the original proposals were very controversial, but, because of the representations of many people, including their own, they believe that the Bill is now in pretty fine shape and commands the support of Scottish parents. I have to tell both of them that that is not so.

The Minister will refer ad nauseam in his reply to the fact that parents have said that they want to be more involved in the running of schools, but parents have said time and time again that what they want is reform of the school and college council system. Parents were promised such a reform by the Government at the general election. They do not want to take over responsibility for running the schools, but that is what the Government are seeking to impose upon them. The hon. Member for Dumfries and the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside know that to be the case, but they are seeking to protect their position.

Throughout the consultation process the conduct of Scottish Office Ministers has aroused widespread suspicion. People realise now, if they did not realise it before, that the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) has proved that he is as ideological as any Marxist and that he is as committed to getting his way as any revolutionary, although he has corrupted his mentor, Adam Smith, who would not recognise the hon. Gentleman's interpretation of his views.

During the general election campaign, the Secretary of State denied that the Government would propose opting out. He maintained that the proposal was to reform school councils. I support that proposal, and I remind the Secretary of State of the letter that he wrote to me on 29 May 1987, just a few days before the general election. He said:

"If you wish to understand Scottish Conservative policy you would find it helpful to read our Scottish Manifesto and not the English one".

I would say the reverse is the truth.

"This would ensure that you did not make yourself look foolish by attacking policies that are not being proposed.

Our Manifesto for Scotland promises that:

'We will improve the management of schools, increase local autonomy and give parents and other local interests a more important role in the running of their schools.'"

I could not disagree. The Secretary of State continued:

"'To achieve these ends, we will initiate a major reform of school councils so that they will be equipped in co-operation with headmasters and teachers to assume advisory and executive responsibilities in the running of their schools.'"

The Secretary of State commented:

"I am sure that the electors in Gordon would be interested to know which of these policies is opposed by you."

The answer is, none of them. The Secretary of State then said:

"They will note the Manifesto for Scotland does not refer to 'opting out'; and that, contrary to your assertion, we have made no such proposal for Scotland."

The Secretary of State for Scotland wanted the people of Scotland to vote on that basis. Even on those words he got a message that suggested that he did not have resounding support in Scotland. To suggest that what we shall vote on tonight bears any resemblance to what the Government proposed during the general election campaign is to mislead the House to a considerable degree.

I do not propose to dwell on the opting-out argument. I accept the Secretary of State's assurance that the Bill is not about opting out, but there are a few relevant points that I wish to make. For most of Scotland, the idea of opting out is alien and unwelcome. Comprehensive education in Scotland had grown up naturally and in most cases it works extremely well. People in my constituency are concerned about the fact that the Government might be thinking about creating a system that will lead to unnecessary division and conflict where none now exists. For the Secretary of State to suggest—perhaps he was quoting Alan Massie in the Scottish edition of *The Sunday Times* last Sunday—that if there is no demand for opting out there will be no problem if it is introduced is deliberately to misunderstand the opting-out process. If a school board is taken over by a self-interested, privileged clique, it might stir up a campaign for opting out, and if that clique pushed it to a vote there would be winners and losers. The fact that the majority won would not stop the minority from losing and not getting what it wanted. That is particularly absurd in a rural area, where the nearest school might be 20 miles away. The idea of opting out is unworkable, just as the parents' charter is effectively unworkable in many rural areas.

It is worth noting the selective nature of the Government's argument. Let me take the case of Jordanhill college school. I, together with many other hon. Members, have received many representations about it. The parents wanted to opt in to the Strathclyde regional council system, not to opt out as they have now been encouraged to do as a "guinea pig" for the Government's testing of the water. That school was caught between a Labour-controlled region that would not accept it and a Tory Government who were determined to use it as a guinea pig. The parents' wishes did not triumph at the end of the day, so I do not think that we should take lectures from the Government about wishing to take on board what parents want.

Opting out is the first step to introducing selection and the creation of grammar schools. The Prime Minister, who is the product of a grammar school and who ought to be an awful warning to us all, is known to favour the reintroduction of grammar schools, but outside cities in

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Scotland they never existed. It is no wonder, therefore, that she is seen to be out of touch with the wishes and aspirations of the people of Scotland. That is why my constituents tell me in increasing numbers that "We dinna want yon wifie" interfering in Scottish affairs.

Parents continue to express concern about the Bill, and I shall deal with those concerns in the remainder of my speech. Many people will welcome in principle the basic approach of clauses 10 to 17. They require the provision of policy statements, annual reports and more financial information to parents and schools. I stress, nevertheless, that that welcome development could be achieved by means of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, if necessary with minor amending legislation to enforce it. This Bill is not required to introduce that welcome development.

I have already said that the Secretary of State for Scotland's expressed concern about parents' views is touching, but it is inconsistent. The Secretary of State wants parents to agree with his ideology. During the lifetime of the last Parliament, parents campaigned over a period of two years to persuade him to meet and negotiate with the teachers to ensure a fair settlement of pay and conditions and an end to the dispute, but he was not interested and he did not respond to their wishes. He dragged out the dispute unnecessarily for two years. The final settlement that he produced was based largely on proposals put forward by me, along with my colleagues and with alliance councillors in Scotland, two years before —when he was appointed—he finally decided that he could bring forward very similar proposals which could have prevented the dispute in the first place. That is the corruption of his view.

Let me respond to the gratuitous insult handed out by the Secretary of State when he described the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) as sounding like a Liberal—the implication being that he believed in the principle, but could not support the practice. I should have thought, first of all, that that was a very good summation of the Secretary of State's position on the issue of Scottish home rule. Secondly, he has shown rather less consistency, conviction or ideal on principle since he stopped being a Liberal than during the brief period when he was a member of the party. He has also demonstrated considerably less decisiveness since then. That is not an invitation: we do not wish to be associated with him!

In the last Parliament, the Secretary of State's then colleague Mr. Gerald Malone refused to address a meeting of 1,200 parents at Aberdeen grammar school during the teachers' dispute, because it would have involved sharing a platform with a member of the Educational Institute of Scotland. That is how keen he was to consult parents on their views. The parents of Aberdeen made it clear what they thought of that when they had the chance.

In our view, education should be a partnership between the education authority and teachers on the one hand, and between parents, pupils and the community on the other. That is one of the reasons for our belief that no one group should be able to outvote the other on decisions affecting education. While we would still prefer reformed school councils, we feel that if school boards are set up or strengthened, they should consist of equal representation from both sides, the parents providing the largest group and probably the chair, but not providing the controlling interest. I also consider it important to make provision for pupils to be represented, because there is much talk in the House about parents being the consumers of education, whereas the actual consumers are the children. At the ages of 15, 16 and 17 they have something to say that is relevant and should be listened to.

I heard what the Secretary of State had to say about head teachers' views on being denied the vote, but I still consider it comparable to denying the managing director a vote on the board. If the head teacher has both to propose and to implement policy, it is reasonable that he should have a hand in determining it. That, I believe, is still the majority opinion. It is also felt that the local regional councillor should be able to attend and speak on any school board in his area. No one is suggesting that he should be a member of them all, or could attend them all; he should, however, have the right to do so. After all, he is the elected representative of the local education authority.

I feel that it is right to propose a board for every school, and we think that that should have been promoted for school councils. I agree, however, with the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside that steps should be taken to ensure that the feeder primary schools and the community interests are represented, although I share reservations about why in some cases they have been excluded.

Many parental anxieties about who will come forward to stand for a school board will not easily go away. A number of the best people will be unable, owing to various other commitments, to take a full part. Many will wish to go on to a board more to promote the interests of their own children than to promote the wider interests of the school at large. That might pervert the intentions, especially when they have that degree of control. A small group or clique, whether politically or personally motivated, could shift the priorities of a school very quickly to favour a more vocal or more able minority against the wishes of the majority. That is the sort of concern that has been expressed to me, and is contained in a file inches thick.

The power to raise funds, while desirable because existing parent-teacher associations have that power, is nevertheless a dangerous development if it goes too far. The Minister knows perfectly well that a school board operating in a wealthy area will raise much more than one operating in a poor area. For that to become the basis of resource allocation would be a very unfair development.

The counter to that—of which the Minister should be aware—is that it would not be unreasonable for a local authority, if that did happen, to suggest cutting its allocation to the school in question and redistributing it to more needy schools. That would be divisive, and I feel that a ceiling should be set.

The Government have entirely failed to prove their case that the Bill represents the real aspirations of parents in Scotland. They have tried to argue that it does, but have been unable to produce clear evidence. All the representations that I am receiving still suggest that parents are extremely sceptical and dubious about the Government's motivations. In my view, the Bill remains a politically motivated diversion to prevent our noticing that Scottish education continues to be underfunded. It says nothing about nursery provision, which is patchy in the extreme; about class sizes; about school closures; about

resources for curriculum development. It says nothing about developing adult education, or about providing the time and resources for in-service teacher training.

Those are the issues that really concern people in education, and the Government know it. But here we are discussing a Bill that has nothing to do with the real, crucial, central issues in Scottish education. It is a diversion to try to take the heat off. It does not even tell us how parents can be involved nationally in the development of thinking about education. Why can we not have an advisory committee that involves parents and teachers, and ensures that it is not only the narrow minds in the Adam Smith Institute that formulate the future of Scottish education policy. That particularly applies to those who have opted out of the education process in the state sector in Scotland, and have the cheek to tell us how our children should be educated according to their political priorities.

I believe that the overwhelming majority of parents in Scotland have no confidence in the Tories' education policy. They believe that the Bill does not represent the real aspirations of parents to be involved and consulted, and that it is damaging and divisive. We shall therefore vote against it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Mr. Bill Walker.

Hon. Members: Are you sure?

6.47 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Mr. Deputy Speaker is certain—not just sure—that what I have to say is relevant. The first reason for that is that I can assure the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) that I attended state schools, and so did my children, who left not long ago. My experience, therefore, can be described as current. I can also assure the hon. Gentleman that I have never been a member of the Liberal party, although I was twice asked to join.

It is interesting that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) objected to the interest taken by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in Scottish education. He seemed to think that there was something wrong about that. I intervened to ask him whether the Leader of the Opposition was taking an interest in Scotland, and whether he was aware that the Himalayas were not in Scotland. He looked nonplussed. It was obvious that he had not heard, or listened to, the interview in which the Leader of the Opposition took part with Kirsty Wark on the BBC, when he said that he had not mentioned the problems of the environment in the Himalayas.

When asked about matters affecting Scotland, as I recollect, another area that the right hon. Gentleman did not mention was devolution. Devolution is passing power down to the people, which is exactly what will happen if the Bill proceeds through both Houses, as I am sure that it will. When it becomes law, we shall devolve power to the people who matter—the parents of the children concerned.

Often, when we talk about schools, the last people about whom we speak, and often think, are the children. Yet the purpose of the schools is to serve only the children. We would not require schools if there were no children. *[Laughter.]* Opposition Members find that humorous. They often miss the fundamental and important matters because they become too involved in peripheral areas. That is not surprising. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) is not present. He described the Scottish Office as a peripheral Department. He said:

> "There is a need for awareness on the part of Ministers in peripheral Departments such as the Welsh and Scottish Offices".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 10 March 1988; c. 46.]

That is the thought of a Scottish Labour Back-Bench Member.

We now know that the Leader of the Opposition believes that the Himalayas have some connection with Scotland, and we understand that the hon. Member for Motherwell, South believes that the Scottish Office is a peripheral Department. In some ways, that tells us why the Opposition are approaching the problem in the way that they are. There is no doubt that we have to view our schools in the light of recent events. One cannot ignore the stress that existed within the system during and after the teachers' strike. There is no doubt that that put enormous stresses and strains on the system and that it affected many children. In fact, one of my children was affected by the strike and it affected the children of many other hon. Members. If we are honest, we will agree that we have to find a better way of managing, running and controlling our schools because we do not want to go through that again.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): I am always interested in industrial relations matters. Can the hon. Gentleman say what aspect of the Bill would have avoided the problems that arose during the teachers' dispute?

Mr. Walker: The answer is effective communications. The hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) and I have both been involved in industrial relations. We have both been executives and officials in trade unions and I have been a director of personnel, so I know something about the other side as well. I can assure the hon. Gentleman—he must know this if he wants to get into industrial relations—that as often as not matters such as that can be resolved by more effective communication at local level. Some schools did not go on strike because at local level they did not wish to do so. Very often the way to avoid mass disruption is to have more effective communication at local level.

There is no doubt that if the school boards are operated effectively they will improve communication between the customers—in this case parents and children—and the teachers. Those people have a common aim and object and if they can be made to work more efficiently—*[Interruption.]* I do not find this at all amusing. The hon. Gentleman representing the Labour party on Scottish education seems to find this amusing. I find that disturbing. The matter is serious. We have to accept that the stress that arose during the teachers' strike might have been substantially avoided had there been better feedback, more effective communication and more effective ways of finding out what was going on at the chalk face.

It is true that the changes that have been introduced in the curriculum and in examinations are a move in the right direction. However, they have brought about an additional workload. Whenever there is an additional workload, it is important that communications within any organisation are effective. Communication is a two-way thing.

Sadly, the schools councils, which could have played an effective role in communication, were found not to be as

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effective as many of us would have wished. Indeed, I could probably sum up the feeling of the House by saying that they were a disappointment. One would have hoped that the system, as it was structured, would have provided more effective parental influence within schools. I know that within some schools in my constituency the schools councils work very well. However, I am aware that schools councils do not exist in some schools, never mind work. The reason why they do not exist in some schools is that from the outset they were considered to be a non-job. They did not have the statutory backing that would provide them with the means to bring about beneficial changes within schools. Indeed, it was felt that they were not productive in terms of the time put into them. That is sad, and it explains why we need school boards.

The current position facing us in Scotland cannot be ignored. There are problems facing education authorities. For instance, there is the decline in school rolls and there is population movement, which means that in some beautiful school buildings there are insufficient children to fill the places available. There is also the historical ingredient. Some schools have a good reputation and parents want their children to attend such schools. Those schools are described as popular. As I said earlier, I believe that the Liberals see that as snob value. There may be something in that; I do not know.

I know something of the Harris academy, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion). Incidentally, that academy is not in his constituency but in the constituency of Dundee, West. The Harris academy has always been a popular school. In the days of secondary modern schools, secondary schools and academies, the Harris was one of the popular schools in Dundee and children travelled not just from within the catchment area but from the east end of the city, which is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Dundee, East. I am sure that children probably still do that.

Mr. McAllion: Too many of them.

Mr. Walker: I understand that. However, it happens because the school has a good reputation. The Morgan academy also has a splendid reputation, as did the Grove academy. The hon. Member for Dundee, East will be aware that the Grove academy in Broughty Ferry did not have adequate facilities in the way of buildings and so on. Therefore, the changes in population movement meant that the school was not big enough. That was one of the difficulties.—*[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) wish to intervene? I cannot hear what he is saying.

Dr. Moonie: I object to what the hon. Member said about Grove academy. I attended that school for five years and the facilities were excellent and quite adequate for the number of pupils in that part of the town.

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman will know that a large school has been built just outside Broughty Ferry. I am sure that he is not the only former Grove academy pupil in the House.

I repeat what I said: the Grove academy, Harris academy and Morgan academy were all good schools. In addition, there were schools for Catholic children. Those schools were popular because of their reputation. If the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy is not proud of his old school, he should be.

I shall now turn to the reasons why we should support the Bill. I was trying to sketch in the background as to why we are in the position we are in today. It is essential to understand that. As I have said, there were problems brought about by the change in the population, the change in the age structures and the movement of children so that some schools were left with many vacant places. In Dundee there is 40 per cent. over-capacity. One reason why there are objections to children going to the Harris academy is that there is 40 per cent. overcapacity in other parts of the city. The problem of overcapacity is that the cost of maintaining it is substantially felt in rural areas. They find themselves short of funds because schools in the city of Dundee are soaking in the funds towards rent, heating and lighting for places that are not occupied.

I believe that part of the problem is that local authorities—the elected officials and councillors—have found it very difficult to find solutions. There are examples in Strathclyde. I am not going to second-guess what should be done there because I do not know enough about the details and it would be impertinent for me to suggest solutions, but I should prefer to leave to parents the choice of school for their children. That is why the parents' charter was such a wise legislative introduction. I used the powers within the parents' charter. My children attended schools in Perth because there were problems at the local school in Blairgowrie. The problem was that their father was the local Member of Parliament. All hon. Members may face this difficulty over their children's education.

Perth city was not in my constituency any longer, so it was possible for me to send my children to another school where they were not affected by the aggravation they suffered because I am their father. *[Interruption.]* If hon. Gentleman find that amusing, I hope that they are never in a situation where a minority party resorts to very devious tactics, including abusing children—my daughters—and that is all on the record. That is why they were moved. Their father happened to be in a different political party. That is one of the real issues facing many parents who are Members of Parliament.

I notice the smiles on the faces of hon. Gentlemen who can afford and have been to private schools. I expect that they do not find it quite as difficult as I did. I did not have the opportunity to go to a private school, so I know very little about that.

I turn now to this important Bill. We need school boards because we have not been able to find the right mixture of communication within education where parents are able to communicate effectively and bring about changes within schools that are important for their children.

We have made some moves in the right direction as a result of the parents' charter, but that in itself was not enough. One of the reasons why parents took their children away from a school and put them into another was that they were unable to influence the situation within a school that was perhaps in the catchment areas where they were required to send their children. The school council did not perhaps exist, or if it did it was not able to do the job effectively.

The school boards that are envisaged in the Bill will change that, which can only be for the better. It is interesting that the Scottish Parent-Teacher Council

welcomes the publication of the Bill. As its vice chairman, Harry Smith, has said, accountability and communications are dominant themes throughout the Bill. That is exactly what I said to the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) after his intervention—that the Bill will improve communications and accountability. SPTC welcomes the emphasis on accountability of education authorities to school boards. That matter was addressed earlier by several Opposition Members who thought there was something wrong with an education authority being accountable in some way to school boards.

The boards will represent the interests of the children, who are the parties that matter in this situation. It is important that education authorities reflect properly and accurately the wishes of parents in their area, and the accountability of school boards to education authorities and to all parents in the school. That is what the SPTC says.

That is why I believe that every hon. Member should be prepared to support the principle of the Bill. Everyone says that he wants to see more parental involvement and parents having more say. The differences are in detail rather than principle. I welcome the fact that there will be opportunities, within the Bill, for parents to assume much more power, if they wish. I also welcome the fact that consultations between parents and members of school boards in total and the education authority are an integral and essential part of the concept of accountability.

Mr. Norman Hogg: The hon. Gentleman refers to school councils and welcomes the development of powers for school boards. Is this a new Conservative principle? If so, why does that not apply to local authorities? The Conservatives have consistently taken away powers from local authorities, whereas in this case they are saying that education will benefit from additional powers. To which principle does the Conservative party subscribe?

Mr. Walker: I can answer that because I come from a large rural constituency. The hon. Gentleman must be aware that those representing such constituencies find that Highland schools are far from centres of decision making. That centre is Dundee in this case. The communities feel as remote from Dundee as they do from London. They want to see more decisions taken locally. They have always had a co-operative machinery of working locally. There is no question, as anyone with experience of Highland rural areas knows, but that the small local communities have much more community spirit than is the case in the large cities. However, the cities tend to dominate. I have already drawn attention to the 40 per cent. overcapacity in Dundee schools, which is having an adverse affect on expenditure on the Highland rural schools in my constituency. They cannot get enough money because it is being spent in Dundee. Difficult decisions have yet to be taken and Strathclyde authority is facing up to them. I recognise that. But I shall not second-guess them on the appropriate solution, because it would be wrong for me to suggest it.

I believe that with school boards in existence, and the required consultation, and the methods by which parents can choose schools for their children more effectively under a combination of the parents' charter and school boards, we may move away from a situation where the Harris academy is the magnet school in Dundee. That was much to the consternation of the hon. Member for Dundee, East.

I believe that school boards have an essential role to play. When one reads the Bill, one wonders why we have not had boards before. Why has it taken us so long to see the obvious? We can involve parents in education much more directly and give them more accountability and responsibility. That can only be beneficial for the schools, the children and the teachers.

The teachers, too, do not want to work in isolation. They would love to have much more parental interest in their schools. Certainly in my constituency, where I have spoken to many teachers, they all say the same thing. They wish that parents were much more involved. The Bill will bring the opportunity for them to be involved. That is why I see no reason why any hon. Member should vote against the Bill.

7.9 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): Bearing in mind the many serious problems in my constituency, what benefits will the Bill bring it, and will the Bill resolve existing problems in Springburn's schools? Perhaps I can highlight some of the problems about which I have written to the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary. I have put down parliamentary questions and usually the reply is that the matter is the responsibility of Strathclyde. I have also tried to get Adjournment debates and have been told that they cannot be considered because the subject is not a ministerial responsibility.

Yet every day when I open the newspapers or watch television or listen to debates here the Secretary of State and particularly the Under-Secretary seem to be discussing the education affairs of Strathclyde. It seems strange to me that I cannot get answers—the Under-Secretary will confirm that he has received a great many letters from my constituents about various problems—yet he can go on television and talk about the problems of Strathclyde. Springburn is in Strathclyde. Why can I not have answers about the very serious problems in my constituency?

Elmvale school, a primary school, has been earmarked for closure in spite of the fact that new building is due to take place in the area. In addition, a housing estate has been cleared and the Under-Secretary's colleague responsible for housing has stated that he is prepared to see Government money go into that estate—the Fernbank scheme—to turn it into one of the "Quality street" areas that have been discussed in connection with Glasgow.

I welcome all types of housing in my constituency from both the public and the private sector—although there does not seem to be much from the public sector coming our way. If housing is built and families come in, they will need schools. It would be shameful if this school were to be closed and then in a few years' time we had young couples with children wanting a primary school. I would ask the Minister, when he replies to the debate, to tell us whether this Bill will do anything to help that situation.

Up the road from the Elmvale school is the Colston secondary school. Because of the high unemployment in the area, many adults are coming back to that school to sit alongside the present pupils in an attempt to get their O-levels and highers and have a better qualification for jobs which do not exactly grow on trees in that area. In Rosemount, in the Garngad area and the Roystonhill area, a very deprived area, nursery facilities are just not available. Rather than close the school here, I do not see why we should not make the empty classrooms available for children under five, of whom there are many.

[Mr. Michael J. Martin]

I have asked questions and made comments—I hope that the Minister bears this in mind—about a primary school known as St. Rock's. Because of Strathclyde's road building programme and with the encouragement of the Government, if this school closes, the little children who now attend it, some of them only four and a half years of age, will have to negotiate the main Townhead interchange, which includes the M8 motorway. Those who use that motorway in their cars sometimes take their lives in their hands, yet young children may have to negotiate that motorway, the underpasses and the rest. This is not a good thing for children and it is only reasonable that parents should argue for the retention of this school.

Another school that I should like to mention and about which there has been a great deal of activity from the parents is a first-class primary school with an excellent academic record and atmosphere. We have heard Government Members talk about co-operation between teachers and parents: one could not find a better atmosphere in that respect than at St. Bede's primary school. It is open plan and, as a result, disabled children attend it at present. There has been a good deal of discussion about integration for the disabled rather than separation: it exists in St. Bede's primary school.

The interesting thing about that school that I would like to put on record is that an official from the Glasgow area of Strathclyde said that she saw no point in closing the school because the surplus classrooms, of which there were not many, could be used for under-fives and nursery facilities. That was an official from Strathclyde. When the parents pursued that avenue, the official clammed up. She was told by her superiors to say nothing further.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman because I am interested in the development of nursery facilities. Would it not be appropriate for the Minister to tell her, given that he is somewhat under the influence of the Prime Minister, that when, many years ago, she promised that every child wanting nursery education should have it, we in Scotland would welcome delivery of that promise rather than of a promise that nobody wants?

Mr. Martin: I agree with the hon. Member. I know that the Under-Secretary carries a great deal of influence in Downing street and may be able to get that message across.

I have it on good authority from the parents at St. Bede's that the Strathclyde official was told that, because of the pressure and because of the activities of parents in trying to keep the school open, she must keep out of it and say no more about nursery school education.

I understand the plight of a local authority if it is forced to close schools because of population difficulties, but if an official comes up with an idea like this, why tell him or her to be quiet and say nothing further? It will not inspire confidence in the local authority. It does not help the parents. It creates a suspicion that, no matter what they campaign for, somehow or other the authority will step in and override their wishes.

I do not like to criticise a Labour authority but I feel entitled to criticise fairly when I feel that an injustice is being perpetrated in my constituency. One of the many complaints that I have about Strathclyde is that parents and elected members were told that there would be consultation, that there would be what were known as area review committees. It has been put to me that Strathclyde was not required by statute to have them. That is fair enough. But I know from my industrial relations experience that if a boss need not consult but does consult, he must accept the result of such consultations. There is no point in telling people that they will be consulted and that they will be given a fair trial but when it is all over they will be executed anyway, but that is what seems to have happened with the area review committees.

For months, parents went to evening meetings. They gave evidence to these committees, excellent evidence. Many of them sat for hours in the planning department, finding out how many houses would be built in the coming five years in their area so that they could produce good, solid evidence.

The area review committee accepted that many of the schools due for the chop were to be kept open. That was their recommendation, and what happened? The region met in Seamill, on the Ayrshire coast, and within a weekend all the work that had been done by the review committees and the parents was thrown out. I was told that, because some of the area review committees bottled out, someone else would have to make the decision for them. I think that that is shameful and the worst type of public relations.

We are talking about parent power. Had the parents in my area in Strathclyde, and in Paisley as well, not demonstrated outside Strathclyde house, gone to their Members of Parliament and their councillors and attended public meetings, the padlock would certainly have been on the gates in a number of schools in my constituency. The situation would have been worse than the present situation, which is bad enough.

The leader of Strathclyde region wrote to a parent in my constituency who took her disabled child to Strathclyde house to keep an appointment that he did not think that she was doing the right thing by her disabled child and that she was using him. It is shameful that such a letter should have gone to my constituent, Mrs. McDade, who is a dedicated mother. All she wants is to make sure that her disabled child gets the same chance as any other child and is able to go to a local school. For him it will not be a case of going a mile and a half or two miles along the road; it will be 13 miles, because he will have to travel to the other end of the city. It is shameful that letters of that kind should be sent to parents who are fighting for a decent chance for their children.

I do not think that the Scottish Office, and particularly the Minister, come out of this well. The Minister went on television and said that there was no way that Paisley grammar school, Our Lady and St. Francis or Notre Dame would be closed down. When the interviewer pressed him, he said that there was going to be a parliamentary order, which went before the House not so long ago. The Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure said that it was, in effect, illegal.

I do not begrudge these schools being saved just because I am failing to get my own school saved, but I feel that it is wrong for the Minister to defend some schools when many parents in other parts of Strathclyde cannot get an answer through their Members of Parliament and are told that it is a matter for Strathclyde. What is wrong with Colston? Why cannot Colston get the same attention as Our Lady and St. Francis? I do not begrudge Our Lady

and St. Francis being kept open, but when the Minister visited that school he should have taken a wee drive up the London road into the heart of Bridgeton, the east end of Glasgow, where the poorest of the poor live. Yet they have an excellent school, St. Mungo's academy. There is a danger—the Glasgow hierarchy have spoken about this —that, if Our Lady and St. Francis is kept open, St. Mungo's, which has a great reputation and was founded for the children in the east end of Glasgow when state education was not available, could be lost.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): Could I just point out to the hon. Gentleman that I visited Our Lady and St. Francis in the early part of the summer, before there was any proposal for a closure from Strathclyde?

Furthermore, on the basis of the information that has been made available to me, Our Lady and St. Francis would not fall within the scope of the regulations which were laid before the House because the percentage occupancy would be below the 80 per cent. figure.

Mr. Martin: It is interesting that the Minister should say that, but he gave the clear impression that he was putting up a fight for Our Lady and St. Francis to the exclusion of other schools. If he is now saying something different, I hope that the parents of the pupils of Our Lady and St. Francis take note of what he has to say. But I still make the point that Strathclyde—I am more critical of Strathclyde on this issue than any other Labour Member —has to look at the overall position, whereas the Minister has taken the comfortable position of highlighting one or two schools. One school being saved can be the death of another.

Mr. Buchan: Does my hon. Friend agree with me that we would welcome a commitment from the Government to meet Strathclyde region now before coming to a hurried decision about any of these matters? Would that not be helpful to everybody?

Mr. Martin: I agree with my hon. Friend. Had that happened earlier, it would have saved me from being in the awkward position that I am in at the moment. I would have been happy to see Ministers and the leaders of Strathclyde region getting together on this issue. I believe that, if Strathclyde had had more resources from Government, that would have eased the situation. The handling of the situation is to be criticised and the Government deserve some criticism. My hon. Friend is right that perhaps the two parties should get together.

The thing that worries me is that almost every major industry in my constituency has been lost and there has been little in the way of initiatives from the Government. Other areas have enterprise zones and all the rest of it, but not Springburn. The only help for children under the age of 16 in my area is a decent education. I want the people responsible to make sure that they are provided with a decent education.

I know the difficulty that my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) has with regard to Paisley grammar, the so-called magnet school. Like the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), on principle I sent my children to the local catchment area comprehensive school, and as there was a year between them, they were in the same intake. Quite frankly, I regretted that decision, because it was a bad school and left a lot to be desired. But once children are in a school they do not want to leave, because their friends are there. There were a lot of problems in that school.

I would tackle the magnet schools in the following way. If there was evidence that one school was attracting a lot of pupils, I would look at the surrounding schools and find out why parents were voting with their feet. They are not always voting for the so-called snob value. I know that Notre Dame and Our Lady and St. Francis have a nice ring to them, but if parents are walking past schools to go to the magnet schools I want to know what the problem is. Is it the teachers? I know that teachers are well trained and have all the qualifications, but there are bad teachers just as there are bad engineers and bad people in all the professions—including bad MPs. That is the way that I would tackle a magnet school.

I do not think that it is a good idea to put a padlock on the door when the magnet schools are bulging at the seams, because the problem could be solved by getting the children to go to other schools. That creates a great deal of resentment.

The position about school boards may be the same as with tenants' associations, parent-teacher associations and community councils. It is the stalwarts who are left to run the organisations. There will be a big turnout at a meeting of a tenants' association when there is to be a rent rise or when the lift in a block of multi-storey flats breaks down. But for the day-to-day work of the association, the organisers are lucky if there are half a dozen people at meetings.

We are talking about direct elections to school boards. The Minister will recall that, when Wheatley brought in the reorganisation of local government, he said that community councils should be elected directly. In the early days, there was much interest. I was the returning officer for an adjoining ward in Maryhill and there was a big turnout. Now the same community council can hardly get a quorum because of the lack of interest. That aspect of school boards worries me.

Reference has been made to the fact that someone may be on a school board because he wants to make sure that his child is well looked after at school. We know that, in parent-teacher associations, the people who are most interested are the parents of children starting off on their O-levels and their highers. When the children have passed their examinations, there is a new intake of parents in the PTA. The Minister should realise that the same problem will arise with school boards.

I reiterate that Strathclyde and the Minister should get together to resolve the problems of proposed school closures in my constituency and to make sure that children get a decent education.

7.31 pm

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): The House will, as always, have listened with great respect to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin). Obviously it is not for me to comment on the points which he made about his constituency, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister and the Opposition Front Bench will pay attention to what the hon. Gentleman said about parental choice and magnet schools. All afternoon we have been hearing from other Opposition Members that parents choose particular schools solely because of their snob value. In my experience, that is nonsense.

[Mr. Allan Stewart]

Before turning to the main theme of the debate, I want to deal with one or two other points. My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) was a little unfair to the Leader of the Opposition. The background to the quote about the Himalayas is that the Leader of the Opposition made a 50-minute speech to the Scottish Labour party conference and did not once mention devolution. The right hon. Gentleman is to be congratulated on, and credited with, getting some of the priorities about Scottish matters properly into prospective.

The hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) referred to me many times in relation to Paisley grammar school, which is not in my constituency; the House should appreciate that it is not in his constituency either. It is in the constituency of——

Mr. Buchan: Paisley is divided into Paisley, North and Paisley, South. The catchment area runs across both constituencies. I am affected by everything that happens in Paisley, North. I was also speaking for my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mr. Adams). The hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) should not equate my position with his. With respect, his constituency is not within Paisley.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman is getting a bit touchy. All I was doing was making the point that Paisley grammar school is not in his constituency. Of course, I know that it is close to Paisley.

Today the hon. Member clarified the position in important respects in relation to what he and the hon. Member for Paisley, North (Mr. Adams) believe. As I understand their position, they do not agree with Strathclyde's proposal for three non-denominational schools in Paisley, but they do not want the Government to have power to affect that decision. As I also understand it—I shall happily give way to the hon. Member for Paisley, South if I am wrong—he and his hon. Friend want four non-denominational schools in Paisley but one of them would not be Paisley grammar school. I think that is what the hon. Gentleman was saying.

Mr. Buchan: I want Paisley grammar and Merksworth to be merged. We have got the best building in Merksworth and they should be merged. That seems to be manifest.

Mr. Stewart: Of course, the majority of parents of children at Paisley grammar do not want Merksworth. That is the whole point of the debate.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside, (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) and others have said, the amendment on the Order Paper in the names of the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues is curious. It criticises the proposals in the Bill because they only pay "lip service to the genuine need to encourage parental involvement".

So the Labour party is saying that the Bill does not go far enough and that there should be greater powers laid down in legislation for parental involvement. The Labour party wants to increase the legislative provision for parental involvement. That is not the theme of what we have heard from Opposition Members. Every one of the criticisms of the Bill by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) was in precisely the opposite direction. He wants fewer parents on school boards. He is concerned about the powers to involve parents in consultations on books and other facilities referred to in clause 9. He is concerned about the delegation of further powers.

The hon. Member for Paisley, South, who has slipped out of the Chamber for a moment, made a long speech explaining Labour party policy. As I understood, the Labour party is in favour of parental involvement. That is all he said, minute after minute after minute. There were no specific proposals. One has to conclude from the debate that it is the Labour party which is only paying lip service to the whole principle of parental involvement.

The second part of the Opposition amendment is that they are opposed to the Bill because it is a paving measure for opting out. This is probably the first time that an Opposition have opposed a Bill because they are opposed to something which is not in the Bill—a rather unusual position for the Opposition to take. The idea that the Bill is a paving measure for opting out is mistaken. The two concepts can be related in structural terms but they are significantly different. School boards are essentially about parental involvement. Opting out is essentially about parental choice. There is a relationship between the two but school boards are not a prerequisite for opting out.

Mr. Dalyell: Can the hon. Gentleman help the House? Did the Prime Minister or any senior official at Downing street talk to the hon. Gentleman about the proposed amendment which was mentioned in the letter? Was it discussed with him?

Mr. Stewart: I can tell the hon. Gentleman the precise position. I do not think that there has been any secret over a long period that I am in favour of the House considering opting out. It is well known that I wrote to the Prime Minister on behalf of constituents about Paisley grammar school. After the decision had been announced by the Government I wrote again to Ministers saying that I was delighted with the new regulations but proposed to pursue the idea of tabling an amendment or new clause on opting out. I never discussed the matter personally with the Prime Minister or anyone else in Downing street. There are all sorts of allegations about conspiracies, but my position has been clear for a long time to anyone interested in it.

We already have opting out in Scotland, so it is not alien or new or unwanted. We have it in the form of the Jordanhill school, to which the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) referred. He rightly said that the parents at Jordanhill school wanted to opt in to the regional authority, but the regional authority—I do not blame Strathclyde for it, given the position it was in—said it did not want Jordanhill school. So the parents took the next route, which was opting out. The route may have been different but the result was the same. Notre Dame school would be in precisely the same position—it wanted to remain as a regional authority school, but the authority does not want the school. So if, in future, there were opting out, pupils of Notre Dame would be in essentially the same position as those of Jordanhill. I hope that the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) will make the Labour party's position clear on this. If the Opposition are wholly opposed to opting out, they are saying that a Labour Government would close Jordanhill school—the inevitable result of adopting that position.

Opposition Members have made great play of believing that there is no demand for opting out. If there is none, or if it is minimal, as the hon. Member for Garscadden said it was, why are they so worried about it?

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To follow the hon. Gentleman's argument to its logical conclusion, if he is basing it on the use of evidence, why do not he and his hon. Friends accept the clear evidence of support for devolution of powers for Scotland, including powers to run the education system?

Mr. Stewart: Tempted as I am to use this opportunity to explain my view of devolution at enormous length, I am sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you would swiftly rule me out of order if I did so.

The essential point about opting out is that it gives people a choice. Nothing will happen unless they want it to happen—unless the Scots want it to happen.

I want to comment on the criticism of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that has been voiced in the debate. We constantly hear from Opposition Members that she does not care about Scotland and is not interested in it. Then when it becomes clear that she is interested and involved in a particular issue she is accused of gross interference with the Secretary of State. Opposition Members cannot have it both ways.

The debate has also shown that Opposition Members are confused about the original proposals and the proposals as amended. The Government are to be congratulated because the consultation process was clearly real and clearly mattered, and the proof is that the proposals were changed, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside said, in a number of significant ways.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: The hon. Gentleman said that school boards were about parental involvement. The Government's proposals are about parental control—a majority of parents in control. Is it not clear that the representations from parents have shown that they do not want that? They want involvement, not control.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman made that allegation and said in his speech that he was receiving many representations from parents who were opposed to the Bill, and I do not dispute his description of his mail bag. But it is significant that the Scottish Parent-Teacher Council said, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North mentioned:

"we can now reiterate that we are broadly in agreement with the provisions of the Bill."

So if members of the council were hon. Members they would vote to give the Bill a Second Reading. That does not mean that they agree with all its details. The organisation speaks on behalf of about 500 parent-teacher groups throughout Scotland. I attended one of its conferences one Saturday morning in Glasgow and the impression I received from everyone there was that they were in favour of the Bill and would make detailed representations on it. I know of no evidence to suggest that that is not the broad view of parents and those involved in education in Scotland.

There were reservations about the original proposals —about the Secretary of State's powers to enforce the pace of change, about school boards perhaps being unrepresentative and about the involvement and professional judgment of teachers. All those categories of concern have been met by the changes that have been outlined by my right hon. and learned Friend. The original power of general order has been removed. Further powers have been inserted in the Bill to ensure that a school board can seek to acquire extra powers only if it can show broad parental support. That means that the reservations about unrepresentative groups were met. It is clear that the school board will have no involvement in determining curricular matters, which are for the professional judgment of teachers.

The revised proposals command widespread support and are sensible, and I have no doubt that the result will be more effective parental involvement in school education in Scotland, to the benefit of all.

7.48 pm

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): This is, in many ways, a strange debate, because the proposal before us is so small-scale and innocuous that one wonders why it excites so much attention. Compared with other parts of the world, there is no doubt that Scotland has little parental involvement in education. It is agreed on the Left and the Right of the political spectrum that there has not been adequate parental involvement in Scottish education. It is strange that I have heard no one adequately challenge the use of the term "parental involvement". Is it not ludicrous that we have been talking about a minimum of four and a maximum of seven people being involved in a school, and calling that parental involvement?

This Bill is not about parental involvement; it is about an added tier of management in schools, not necessarily acting as a massive stimulus to parental involvement. Unfortunately, as the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) said, throughout the autumn, winter and spring, discussion of this Bill, which concerns school boards, has been the dominant issue in Scottish education. It is not the dominant issue in Scottish education. The dominant issues are resources, crumbling school buildings and the need for a genuine partnership between the Government and the local authorities. The dominant issues also include nursery education and, quite clearly, in an unexamined way, the Under-Secretary of State has cancelled a long-standing review into nursery education. That was because if the value of nursery education had been reviewed, that would have involved resources. However, we are not discussing that, nor are we discussing education throughout life.

Something happening in my constituency has more to do with parental involvement than has the Bill. It is about the involvement of adults in education. In the secondary schools in my constituency, about 700 parents have returned to school. They are parents and they have now entered into a real partnership in serious education. That is not the sort of education that we are discussing.

Why has the Bill excited such fervour? It is because the motive of the Government is to pave the way for opting out proposals. That cannot be denied. I listened to the Secretary of State and watched the face of the Under-Secretary of State and I know which of them is telling the truth. When the Under-Secretary of State was talking about opting out, every now and then he forgot himself and exhibited genuine enthusiasm for opting out. That is where he is trying to drive the Scottish education system. If that is so, let us have it honestly.

Parental choice is a key concept and we are all in favour of it, except where one person's choice is the denial of another's freedom. That is the borderline that we must

[Mr. Tony Worthington]

define. In some circumstances, people exercising their choice will damage the education system of other people. Sometimes we cannot have an unfettered choice. If all the citizens of Dundee wanted to send their children to Harris academy, some of them would have to be refused, because it would be crazy to have the other schools lying empty. That would be a waste of public resources.

Sometimes the motivation that seems to lie behind parental choice is about creating enclaves of better-off people who are fleeing from low-status populations. That occurs in some cases. People can use the mechanism of property prices and gain control of a school. In that way they can say that they will not be infected by people that they do not like and can get that sort of cachet for a school. We have proof of that in Paisley. Undoubtedly the best buildings, resources and playing fields are available in Paisley grammar school. I understand that the education authority could tell Paisley grammar school that it could move lock, stock and barrel, that it could take the rector, staff and pupils and put them into Merksworth high school and call it Paisley grammar school. Would Paisley grammar school buy that? No, it would not, because it would have to mix with Ferguslie park.

The school would be setting up an enclave of separate and privileged pupils. Many people would want to be in that enclave and a means would have to be found of choosing the pupils to attend that school. That could be done in a number of ways. It could be done by catchment areas, but that might let in some unfortunate people. It could be done by ability, by going back to testing, or by fees. We must face that. We had opting out before. I am not speaking about Jordanhill school. When the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) spoke about that, he forgot to mention that the Government were in a hole over that school. It was just before the election and they had fading hopes that they could regain Glasgow, Hillhead. Therefore, it was not a decision in principle.

We have had grant-aided schools before. In 1968, Scotland had 29 graint-aided schools, 27 of which charged fees and selected their own pupils. Seventy per cent. of the pupils had an IQ of over 110 and 80 per cent. were from social classes 1 and 2 and virtually none was from social classes 4 and 5. That is what opting out is about. It is about creaming off and selecting. Under an opting-out system, the Government would ensure that their grant-aided schools were better funded and more generously treated than other schools, and the Government would still put the hems on the local education authorities.

The way that the Secretary of State has behaved on opting out has demeaned his office. A massive reason for having a Secretary of State for Scotland is that there is something culturally valuable and distinctive about having a separate education system. I can say that because I have experience of both systems. The Secretary of State should tell powerful people that they cannot transplant the opting-out proposals from one place to another and that the separate traditions must be respected.

It is striking that there has been no justification from the Secretary of State and there will be no justification from the Under-Secretary of State for the proposals that arise and draw strength from Scottish traditions. We are in a constitutionally dangerous position. It is not just that there are 50 Labour Members and only 10 Tory Members representing Scotland, but that a minority Government, on issues such as the curriculum and assessment or the opting-out proposals, are under the thumb of the Prime Minister. People will become cynical about whether the Secretary of State is safeguarding the Scottish education system.

One of the most important traditions in Scotland, and certainly the one that most impressed me in its education system, is that there is the spirit of what James Scotland in his book on Scottish education called militant democracy, caring about those who are at the bottom of the heap. It is saying that in the education system one must think about such people first. I should like to use an 1817 quote from a historian. It is one that could not be used about the English system:

"The attention which has been paid to the education of the lower orders"—

that is not my phrase—

"of the Scottish nation has been proverbial over Europe for several centuries past."

That is very important but totally lacking in the spirit of the Bill.

The sad thing is that opting out hangs over the Bill. It is totally legitimate for us to say that we know what the Under-Secretary of State is up to. This is a paving measure, a step on the road to opting out. He must say from which Scottish tradition he draws his sense of custodianship of the Scottish education system. Some simple things need to be done. No one will mourn the passing of school councils. As a former representative in Strathclyde, I know that we quickly realised that we had made the wrong decision about school councils in terms of having groups of secondary schools and their feeder primaries.

Strathclyde council would have loved to have a school council for every school, but—it is interesting to note that the real cost of £20 million is now coming out—we could never have gone to the Secretary of State, with the grip that he has tried to impose on the education system, and said that we intended to spend an extra £10 million next year on creating extra administrators to run the new school councils system. How could we have done that, especially when the Government would have said that they would claw back the money and that we would pay three times as much—in other words, £30 million?

Mr. Dalyell: If that question had been put in my constituency or anywhere in Lothian, the quick riposte would have been, "What about the school drains, the walls that are cracking, the ceilings that are peeling and the windows that are boarded up at Queensferry high school? What about some basic maintenance?"

Mr. Worthington: I could not agree more. It is a massive job setting up school boards for 1,200 schools, although the number is falling. There is no doubt that we should have been encouraging the teaching profession to be much less protective. A secure profession involves other people. It is not frightened by other people's involvement. When I was with Strathclyde council, we were talking about some degree of financial devolution to schools, because some of the procedures by which books were ordered were labyrinthine and should have been stopped. There is much that we can encourage, but we should not reduce the ability of the education authority.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am fascinated by the hon. Gentleman's argument that Strathclyde council could not

do anything because the Government would not let it spend the money. Why is it that, as soon as our consultative paper was published last summer, both Strathclyde and Central region councils fell over themselves to produce proposals to have school councils for individual schools and produced leaflets explaining how they were going to do this, when they had had the power to do so since 1975? Are they not at least open to the accusation that, seeing that the Government had identified a popular measure and under the pressure of our consultative paper, they should have reacted?

Mr. Worthington: The council's first proposal to change its school councils proposals was in the 1986 regional manifesto. Work had been going on. That proposal surfaced before the Under-Secretary of State put forward his proposals. In fighting the 1986 election, we were clear about that proposal—it is written down; indeed, I wrote it —but we had to reform the system of school councils.

However, we must not lessen the ability of the education authority to act in a strategic way. There have been some considerable steps forward in recent years by the local education authorities which, because of their size, can now think in terms of broad development of policy. Under opting-out proposals, the danger is that those authorities would be operating rump schools.

I wish to make a point which has not been mentioned but is of great significance. I am not putting this point in a party political way. It is a problem that the education authorities and the Secretary of State need to tackle—non-attendance at school. Under the original proposals, non-attendance was to be tackled by the school boards. I am relieved that the problem will not be tackled by the new school boards because that would tend to get in the way. One has to face the fact that the major function of all school councils, certainly those with which I was involved, was to consider the problem of non-attendance at school.

The way in which non-attendance at school is dealt with in Scotland is diabolical. If it is of any benefit to anybody, it is of benefit to the truant. I hope that the Secretary of State will be willing to open up this issue and have discussions with local education authorities as to how it would be possible to get all the relevant agencies round the table and discuss matters more sensibly.

In conclusion, we are all in favour of parental involvement, but the Bill is not about parental involvement. All the research of recent years has shown that the parent is the key factor in the school and in supporting the child. However, if we obtain such parental involvement, schools will have to operate differently. They will have to be resourced differently. Links between home and school will be different from what they are at present. That is the kind of parental involvement that Opposition Members wish to see. Parental involvement that involves four to seven parents in a school attending meetings is a charade for involvement.

8.5 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I listened with great fascination to the speech of the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), but the tradition that he defines as being relevant to the Scottish psyche and the Scottish approach to education is perhaps in itself indicative of why the people of Scotland voted in a particular way at the last general election. Many of the overall strategies and philosophies of the Government are not acceptable to the people of Scotland because they do not show the caring face about which we in Scotland are deeply concerned.

I have also listened with interest to other speeches. Unfortunately, I had to miss one or two speeches because I had to return to Standing Committee D where a vote was taking place, but I heard the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) speak on the issue of opting out. I find his argument difficult to follow. He spoke about the validity of evidence in supporting his arguments, but no survey has been conducted in Scotland which shows that there is substantial support for opting out. There are no statistics to support that argument.

It does not seem to me to be appropriate that, because of one or two cases in specific parts of the country, we are now faced with the possibility of local diktats bringing forward national legislation. I do not see that, because there are particular problems affecting the constituency of the hon. Member for Eastwood, his argument should be followed through in every other part of Scotland. Using a specific argument to support a general case is surely something that we in this House should avoid.

Like the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie, I believe that the Bill is most inappropriate at this stage. People in my constituency do not rush up to me and talk about school boards or about opting out. When they talk about education problems, they are more interested in the curriculum and assessment issues that are not being dealt with in the Bill. They are more concerned about whether money will be made available for school building programmes. For example, phase 5 of the Milne's high school, Fochabers, may not be completed as early as possible because of financial restrictions. That leaves the school with a split site, which we do not want.

I speak for head teachers in primary schools. They are having to teach about three of four days a week, and yet, if they had an extra two pupils in their schools, an extra teacher would be allocated. As yet we have had no sign from the Scottish Office as to when the staffing reviews will be published. Such anomalies can be eradicated to enable my head teachers to do the work that they so wish to do within their schools. There is a variety of education issues which abound in Scotland at present and to which the Bill has no, or very little, relevance.

When we discussed education in the Scottish Grand Committee last month, I argued that Scotland needed an opportunity to consider the broad spectrum of education issues and to draw up a national strategy for our education system. There is no doubt in my mind and in the minds of many hon. Members and of those directly involved in education that the Scottish education system has been suffering as a result of underfunding and under-resourcing under the Government. The sooner that we can consider how best to advance Scottish education, the better. It is very unfortunate that we do not have a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs as we could have examined the education system in Scotland in great detail to ensure that policies are enacted to the benefit of all pupils throughout Scotland.

Everyone believes in parental involvement in schools. It is rather like being in favour of love and peace; no one in his right mind would be against them. However, the Bill is not about parental involvement in the sense that we understand it.

Reference has been made to the fact that other European countries have systems of parental involvement

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

that are much better than ours. I have analysed those systems in the European Community to discover whether the proposals in the Bill compare favourably with the systems in other countries. There are elements of similarity in the proposals in the Bill and the systems elsewhere. However, no executive powers like those in Denmark will be granted to the councils under this Bill. There are many other differences which reveal that there will not be the kind of parental involvement that the Minister suggests.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I want to correct the hon. Lady. As I recall, she tabled a parliamentary question about the visit to Denmark, although I may be wrong about that. Far from having no executive powers, the powers granted to school boards in Denmark, which consist entirely of parent representatives, go so far as to give them the power to approve the school timetable and the textbooks used in the school. We have excluded those matters from the Bill. Therefore, she is right to state that our proposed system differs from that in Denmark. The Danish system goes a great deal further and when the BBC interviewed trade unionists, teachers, parents and others in every walk of life with an interest in education it could not find anyone to speak against the Danish system.

Mrs. Ewing: I tabled a parliamentary question about the Danish visit to establish the visit's costs. It was interesting to note that the costs would have covered at least one major capitation fee for a large school in Scotland.

Having read the document prepared by the European Commission, I understand that many of the powers in the Government's proposals are not included in the Danish example and are not listed in the delegated powers contained as possible roles for school boards in the Bill.

My basic concern about the proposals is that they will lead to a very bureaucratic system of administration and involvement. When we consider the way in which the elections must be conducted, the suggested number of meetings, the amount of paper work involved and the co-options on to the school boards should any vacancies arise, we realise that a variety of bureaucratic administration will exist. However, the Government have told us that they want to streamline bureaucracy and eradicate it. Yet we are imposing a very bureaucratic approach to parental involvement on a hard-pressed education system.

Subsections (4) and (5) of clause 17 mean that hundreds of school boards could knock at the doors of local authorities demanding information and the local authorities will come under pressure. The demand will have to be serviced by the education authorities, and that will lead to additional pressures on local authorities.

I have always believed that the Government would develop school councils rather than establish a totally new system. The Minister might be interested to know that some time ago, in my dim and distant past in 1974, before I entered the House, I served on a school council in Stirling at St. Modan's school. We tried to anticipate the proposals for school councils and tried to make them work. The central region responded very effectively to the Macbeth report in 1980 and to the consultative document in 1984. It is strange that the consultation document was issued by the Government in the last Parliament in 1984, yet no attempt was made to reform school councils, or to give them additional powers to build on what was already effective. As the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) stressed, school councils have worked very effectively in the Grampian region.

Mr. Salmond: Is my hon. Friend aware that, when she was serving assiduously on the school council in Stirling, the Minister was serving on a student representative council in St. Andrew's? The ideas he proposed in that body are just as bizarre as today's proposals.

Mrs. Ewing: I am aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) attended the same university as the Minister. I suggest that the Minister's experience at St. Andrew's would have encouraged him to adopt a flexible approach to Scottish education because he switched courses midstream and benefited from the flexible system in Scotland.

The hon. Member for Eastwood and the former Member for Argyll and Bute, Mr. John MacKay, did not have the stamina, dedication or commitment to bring forward reforms which would have been widely acceptable. If we analyse what has been said about school boards and parental involvement, we find that all the organisations and parents tell us that they want the school council system expanded, developed and given additional powers, using what already exists as a foundation rather than replacing it with the Government's bureaucratic approach.

Various statistics have been bandied around about the costs of the proposals, ranging from £20 million to £5 million from the Treasury Bench. There seems to be a great deal of vagueness about the costings. I have already referred to the elections and the duplication of ballot papers, which will have to be posted to every parent because one paper should not go to two parents in one household and each should be entitled to a single letter. Each board will have a clerk. If the clerk is not appointed internally, the clerk will have to be paid. If boards meet during the day, will appropriate cover be offered for teachers who have to attend board meetings? Will additional staff be appointed to fill the vacancies? If meetings are held in the evening, will teachers be expected, as part of their contract, to attend? Will any compensation be offered to them in the form of time off in lieu or additional payments?

Travelling and subsistence allowances are to be paid to board members. If we are to pay such allowances, why not consider the payment of attendance allowances? If meetings are held during the day, why not pay financial loss allowances in the way that we pay councillors? If people are to be effective, we must cast the net as wide as possible and consider the financial implications in the Bill. I suspect that the Scottish Office has not done its arithmetic effectively on this matter.

I want to emphasise my fears about dividing the teaching profession from the parents. That becomes most obvious when we consider the Bill's implications for head teachers. I am not claiming that all head teachers are perfect or ideal, nor would I say that all hon. Members or anyone else were perfect or ideal. However, head teachers have reached their positions after years of training and experience and invariably because of widespread support from fellow members of the profession. They should

therefore be listened to with great care. However, the implications of clauses 5, 9 and 10 for head teachers are that the Government are pushing extremely heavy responsibilities and duties on the shoulders of our head teachers, but are not giving them back any additional powers.

Mr. Buchan: We must also consider the proposal for the appointment of the headmaster in which there is a veto by deleting one leet and adding another. There will be competition for the appointment of headmasters. God help me if I had ever applied in such a position.

Mrs. Ewing: The hon. Gentleman has made a valid point that I was going to cover. I endorse his concern about the system of appointments of head teachers as that is affected by the proposals in the Bill.

How on earth are busy head teachers—there are far too few women head teachers in Scotland, but perhaps that is a matter for another debate—to find additional time to meet the responsibilities and duties being placed upon them? They are being asked to give advice to the school boards, to submit spending plans to the boards—and they cannot proceed with any spending plans unless they are approved by the boards—and to issue policy statements on curriculum assessment, discipline rules and school uniform. A variety of pressures are being placed on our head teachers, but they receive nothing in return.

I am deeply concerned about head teachers not being able to spend their budgets without the approval of the board. I was a principal teacher of remedial education and I remember filling in all the requisition forms. I was trained as a specialist in that subject and I doubt whether many people would have understood the nature of the equipment and books that I requested. However, they were vital for the children in my class. It will be extremely difficult for many parents to understand why particular requisitions are being made. If we are reaching the stage where a board can control a school's per capita budget, we are moving quickly to external control of the curriculum and the privatisation of the Scottish education system as we understand it.

Those are a few of the many points that have led me to my decision to vote against the Bill. I have heard nothing from Conservative Members to persuade me to reconsider my decision.

I am sure that many amendments will be made to the Bill in Committee. As usual, the English Conservative majority will come trooping through the Lobby, heavy footed, to vote down the aspirations of the Scottish people. But I hope that all those hon. Members who have emphasised the need for consultation and the fact that no one need fear consultation will support the motion in the name of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel), if we are fortunate enough to have a Division on it. If the Bill were committed to a Special Standing Committee, it would enable hon. Members to request oral evidence and it would offer a genuine opportunity for consultation with Scottish education establishments, parent-teacher organisations and parent-teacher councils. All those organisations could be invited to address the Committee and, at the end of the day, if their views were listened to we might emerge with a different set of proposals from those in the Bill.

8.22 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): If my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State needed any further support for the Bill, he must have been somewhat encouraged by the speech made by the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington). We were told that the Bill was not really necessary because Strathclyde was just getting there. If, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you believe that, by some pure coincidence, Strathclyde was just discovering the need for parental involvement at the time that my right hon. and hon. Friends were considering extending that involvement as a matter of policy in Scotland, you will probably also believe that it was a sheer coincidence that the Inner London education authority suddenly discovered the need for excellence at the same time that the boroughs were being given the power to opt out of that authority.

As a Scot with an English constituency, I warmly welcome the Bill because I do not want to see Scotland denied any of the advantages that we already have in England. Most of the provisions in this legislation were enacted in this House in the Education (No. 2) Act 1986. They are already coming into force in England and have already been warmly welcomed here. Certainly in my constituency parents are excited by and involved in the various elections and the new opportunities that are being extended, not by the Education Reform Bill but by the 1986 Act that is already on the statute book which allows them to play a much greater part in the management of their schools.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will not take it amiss when I say that this is hardly a radical Bill. Indeed, it is hard to see how any hon. Member on either side of the House—I must exempt the Scottish National party because it always seems to adopt the most curious position on Scottish affairs—can possibly object to the Bill on Second Reading. The steps already taken in Scotland by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State to extend parental choice of school and to provide more information about schools are incomplete without giving parents the power and ability to act on that wide choice and greater information and that power and ability are summed up in the words "parental involvement".

I readily concede, as has been argued, that there are great strengths in the present Scottish education system. It has some attractive features when compared with the English education system. But that strength depends on its heavily centralised nature, and in those local authority areas where political control rarely varies, over the years that strength has become a weakness. In fact, the system has become fossilised. It has become almost Soviet in its direction and uniformity, because there is a huge lacuna at its heart, and that lacuna is the absence of the involvement of parents in the running of their schools.

The new board proposed in the Bill will complete and underpin the degree of parental involvement in the new system that will make teachers and teaching more accountable and will, for the first time, give Scottish parents a proper influence and control in the running of their schools, what is taught in schools, and what is learnt in schools.

How could anybody possibly object to the principle of such a Bill? They could do so on two counts and we did not hear either of them from the hon. Member for Glasgow,

[Mr. Michael Fallon]

Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). First, he could have argued that parents do not want such involvement. He was careful not to argue that. It is clearly nonsense. The 1986 Act for England has already demonstrated that once parents are given the opportunity to be more involved, to stand for election and have a greater say in the running of their schools, they leap to that opportunity, particularly where the involvement is real, where real decisions have to be taken and real issues have to be faced. The evidence put forward by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State already demonstrates that to be the case in Scotland where there are issues to be faced. Where issues such as Paisley emerge, parents do not hang back and are ready to be involved. My right hon. and learned Friend gave some interesting and substantial evidence of the extent to which parents already want to be involved.

Secondly, the hon. Member for Garscadden could have argued that parents do not need to be involved; that the present system involves them thoroughly. He did not argue that either. It is his own policy to come forward with some form of strengthened school council. If he was satisfied with the present system he would not be arguing for a stronger system of school councils. The Scottish Labour party's position on this issue is extraordinary. It claims to support the principle of greater parental involvement in schools, yet it will vote against the Bill on Second Reading tonight. It claims to be in favour of parental involvement, but all the objections raised by the hon. Member for Garscadden would have meant either fewer parents on school boards or less power for those who are on school boards.

Finally, the amendment tabled by the Labour party seeks to claim that the Bill does not go far enough. However, it has not even bothered to pretend that its version of strengthened school councils is in any way a stronger substitute for what is in the Bill.

If the Labour party really believed in state education in Scotland, if it really supported public sector education, it would support, not oppose, the Bill tonight. By involving parents to a much greater extent than ever before in the state education system, the Bill extends into the state system the same advantages that other people can purchase outside the state system through their cheque books. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State was right to use that phrase.

The Bill gives to the state system the advantages of higher standards and better performance that come through the exercise of choice and the supply of information to consumers. It gives those advantages to those who cannot afford to buy outside the system. That is where the argument about the Harris academy raised earlier was very relevant.

I know something about the Harris academy, as the children from my village went to the Harris academy. Inevitably, once those choices are extended to parents, the Harris academy will become an ever more popular school. However, the Bill is not about what is to happen to the Harris academy. The Bill is about how we can create more Harris academies. Once we start extending to parents real rights of choice that are not purchased through a cheque book, by buying a house in the catchment area, or by moving into middle-class areas of affluence, once we get a real choice for parents whether or not they have money to purchase it as richer people do, we shall get parents all over the town saying, "Why can't my school be a little bit more like the Harris academy? Why can't the schools in our neighbourhood have the same standards? If my kid can't get into the Harris, why can't he go to a local school that is just as good?" Then the engine of consumer choice will begin to rev up, and parents will get more involved and start to demand more from the system.

What bedevils the education system north and south of the border is not simply the level of achievement, which is worrying enough when we compare the Scottish and English systems with the French and German systems; it is the level of expectation. It is not that children do not achieve as much as they should; it is that parents no longer expect them to do so. Parents will not expect them to do so unless they are involved to a much greater extent than hitherto.

The Bill, plus the previous extension of choice and power within the education system, represents the paperless cheque book. It enfranchises Scottish parents to a much greater extent than ever before. It gives them real power, real information about schools and the ability to choose between them. If they are dissatisfied, and if they are concerned about the way in which a school is run, it gives them the ability and the means to be involved in the management of that school and to play a part in taking key decisions.

Therefore, I find the attitude of the Scottish Labour party wholly ambiguous. It is inconsistent with their so-called primary commitment to devolution. Time and again we are told that the Labour party wants power for the people of Scotland. When we ask them what power they want for the people of Scotland they talk about bureaucracy, more layers of government and an assembly at Edinburgh. Yet every time that my right hon. and learned Friend proposes a measure of real power for the Scottish people, Labour Members go into the Lobby and vote against us. When he proposes real power for the parents of children at Paisley grammar school they oppose us. When he proposes real choice for the users of the Scottish transport group they also oppose us. When he proposes real power and real choice for the users and retailers of Scottish electricity again they oppose us.

Mr. Norman Hogg: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fallon: No.

When my right hon. and learned Friend proposes real power of choice and decision-making for council house tenants they oppose us. Finally, now when my right hon. and learned Friend comes to the House and proposes real power to the parents of all Scottish schoolchildren, Opposition Members object again. I hope that this time, having decided to vote against the Bill tonight, they will at least do us the decency of supporting their own amendment in Committee, and, where they feel that the Bill does not go far enough, coming forward with amendments to strengthen it.

8.34 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): The hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) said that he knew something about the Harris academy in Dundee. He also said that the purpose of the Bill was to look at ways in which we could create more Harris academies throughout Scotland. By that remark, he revealed his ignorance about what is really

going on at the Harris academy. If he spoke to teachers at the Harris academy, they would admit to him that they are openly telling parents in Dundee not to send their children to that school because it is likely to damage their educational opportunities. They will be placed in overcrowded classes in annexes where the teachers are under pressure and cannot give children the attention that they get in other schools in Dundee. That is the practical remedy that the Conservative party is holding out to the people of Scotland through this legislation tonight.

The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) addressed the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) and asked him why, as it became clear in the debate tonight that the Government would not stand in the way of any demand in Scotland for the opportunity to opt out from the state system, they have not taken the same position in regard to a Scottish assembly. There is an overwhelming demand for a Scottish assembly, yet the Government are standing in the way of that demand and refusing to concede to the Scottish people that which they want.

The remarks of the Secretary of State for Scotland in opening the debate were outrageous. It was a gratuitous insult to those who serve on school councils throughout Scotland for the Secretary of State to say that people of ability did not become involved in school councils in Scotland and that people of the second order gave up their time to take part in school councils. I know from personal experience when I served as a parent representative on my school council and as an elected representative as a regional councillor that the ability of the parents who took part in school councils was well above the standard of ability I have seen on the Conservative Benches since I arrived here almost a year ago.

Next Sunday, there is what is described as a unique event in Scottish publishing, with the launch by the *Sunday Mail* newspaper of a comprehensive history of Scotland to be published in 52 weekly parts. Part one has already been sent to Scottish hon. Members. I hope they have taken the opportunity to read it as it contains an excellent introduction by Sir Alwyn Williams, principal and vice chancellor of Glasgow university, in which he attributes the distinctiveness of the Scottish way of life to our education system of historic merit. He very properly points out that the Scottish education system was imported originally, not from England but from the mainland of Europe. The hon. Member for Darlington might take note of that, as he honestly admitted that the idea behind the Bill came from England and was alien to the whole Scottish education tradition.

Sir Alwyn also pointed out that Scottish education now ranks among Scotland's greatest all-time exports, having been successfully transplanted around the world and that, unlike England, its great success has stemmed from a broadly based secondary school curriculum which turns out very well-versed Scottish men and women. That is obvious from the Opposition Benches, if not from the Government Benches.

Sir Alwyn concludes that the best way to safeguard Scotland's cultural heritage is to preserve its education system intact. The university of Glasgow is very fortunate in having a principal with such a perceptive insight into the great strengths and merits in the Scottish education system.

Scotland is very unfortunate in having a Minister responsible for education who neither understands nor cares for the merits of the education system for which he is legally responsible. The intentions of the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland with responsibility for education have never been very difficult to fathom. They are malign rather than benign. They certainly do not include, as he claimed in an article he wrote especially for the *Dundee Courier*, the formation of a real partnership between parents, head teachers and school staff. If those were his intentions, then his proposals for creating a parent majority on school boards would not have been persisted with right through from the consultation process to the Bill that we are debating tonight.

The Secretary of State for Scotland declared the parental majority to be fundamental to the purpose of the Bill. Without parental majorities, school boards would not even be allowed to exist. Yet that very proposal cannot be anything other than divisive between parents, teachers and education authorities.

In its response to his consultation document, the Church of Scotland's education committee told the Minister precisely that. It could not have made it any clearer. It said that it could not accept the proposal that the parent group should have an absolute majority and that if a partnership of concerned bodies was envisaged, a parent majority was not acceptable. The Church of Scotland's education committee wanted parents to constitute a maximum of 50 per cent. on any school board. The majority of the almost 8,000 respondents to the consultation process came out against the proposal for parent majority on school boards. Even the 1980 Macbeth report on schools councils, for which this Government asked, recommended that there should be a balance of teachers and parents on school boards. It is only the Minister with responsibility for education in Scotland who wants an imbalance between teachers and parents and who wants to create an imbalance in favour of parents. That is no small matter, because it goes to the core of what school boards, as envisaged by the Government, are about. They want to have control over schooling in Scotland.

The Secretary of State for Scotland and his friends argue on the surface that they wish to give power to parents, but beneath the surface their purpose is much more insidious. Mr. Fred Forrester of the Educational Institute of Scotland was one of the first to sense what that purpose is: to take away from or seriously to weaken the powers of elected education authorities to control the level of education provision throughout their area—for example, the power to direct special help and additional expenditure to deprived areas—and in its place to substitute what looks like parent power at school board level but what in reality are increased powers for the Secretary of State for Scotland, who can then more easily control the activities of thousands of separated and fledgling school boards than he can control powerful, elected bodies such as education authorities. As Mr. Forrester so aptly put it, for "parent power" under this Bill read "paternalism"—read more centralised and authoritarian control over another important aspect of our lives, our education system. That is the real reason why the Secretary of State has chosen to ignore the majority of respondents to the consultation process that stated their opposition to an absolute parental majority on the new school boards.

However, the consultation process had the very worthwhile effect of making the Secretary of State climb down from the more extreme ceiling powers that he originally advocated. However, the Bill leaves an opening

[Mr. John McAllion]

through which many of the same proposals can be resurrected. The Secretary of State referred to this taking place by means of a process that he described as natural evolution. The right of individual boards to ballot parents against an authority's refusal to delegate powers means that individual schools will have the means by which they can gain control of the school's recurring budget and of staff appointments below senior staff level—the very powers that were so overwhelmingly rejected in the consultation process.

The intention behind this provision is manifestly clear: to allow, in the long run, for the opting out process that is so loved by the Prime Minister and that has been so overwhelmingly rejected by majority opinion in Scotland.

The Government recognise that within individual schools there exist many potential majorities that will vote to take over the ceiling powers and that, in the long run, will vote against the wishes of the minority in that school to take it out of the education system. It may be that this Bill does not technically allow for opting out, but it is a half-way house towards opting out. I take as an example the trade union legislation that was introduced not in one Bill but in a series of Bills. I foresee that the opting-out process will become a reality, not perhaps in this Bill but in the next Bill or in the one after that. It is a step-by-step process by which the Government hope to gain by stealth what they are frightened to impose on the Scottish people publicly.

Clause 10 requires education authorities to provide information to school boards, including policy statements on the curriculum and the assessment of pupils, as well as information on the level of attainment of pupils. That paves the way for the Government's curriculum and assessment policies that were announced at the end of last year, with nationally agreed guidelines and national tests in English and mathematics. They also include new guidelines for the curriculum.

Grove academy was mentioned earlier by the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker). Grove academy school council—the school lies within my constituency—wrote to me recently about the changes in Scottish education provision, and in particular about the proposed curriculum changes. It pointed out that it did not accept the general thrust of the new curriculum and assessment proposals. In its view, some of them are positively harmful to the educational interests of the pupils and destructive to the established Scottish approach to curriculum and assessment matters. It pointed also to the lack of education research to support the Government's confident assertions and general statements. It deplored the priority that is given to some subjects at the expense of more aesthetic subjects which will be neglected under the Government's proposals. It regretted the damage that will be done to the broad and balanced curriculum for which Scottish schools are noted. In particular, it registered its opposition to the kind of information that will be made available, for which clause 10 calls. I quote directly from the letter that the academy sent to me and to the Secretary of State for Scotland. It said:

"The requirement that head teachers should issue statements on attainment levels should be abandoned as harmful to schools, pupils and teachers. Such statements read out of context could produce totally erroneous impressions of the educational achievements of schools and mislead both parents and the general public."

The view of those who will be affected by the Bill is that it is harmful, erroneous and misleading, yet the Government intend to persist with it because they are determined to pursue their policy of favouring some schools at the expense of others.

The Grove academy school council is typical of school councils across Scotland. It does not want the divisive, destructive, class-ridden measures that are the hallmark of this Bill and of the philosophy that lies behind it. The Scottish people have rejected that philosophy time and time again. They rejected that policy less than a year ago at the ballot box by a ratio of 3:1. They voted overwhelmingly against the kind of measures for which this Government stand. They do not want parents to be set against teachers through the medium of the new school boards. They do not want schools to be set against other schools, as will happen under this Bill. They do not want educational effort and expenditure to be wasted on massive shake-ups. Far from advancing the educational interests of all pupils in Scotland, that serves merely to advance the interests of a few pupils at the expense of the majority. The Government, education authorities and Members of Parliament should listen to what parents and pupils want from the school system and the Government should act on what parents say to them. What they are saying could not be clearer. In the words of the parents of the Grove academy school council,

"Resources should be spent on improving the staff ratios and providing enhanced facilities for the schools."

Resources should not be wasted, as the Bill intends, on sowing division and dissatisfaction among school communities. School councils have fought a magnificent fight against the successive attacks on education in Scotland that have been mounted by this Government. Their powers and role need to be strengthened, but not in a way that brings them into conflict with other interested groups in education, or into conflict with teachers and other staff, or into conflict with elected councillors who represent the community at large.

The way forward is through co-operation between all the groups that are interested in Scottish education. We do not want opting out of our Scottish school system. We want genuine opting in by everyone—by concerned parents, teachers, communities, education authorities and central Government—to make sure that our schools work well for all our pupils, not just for some of our pupils, which is the main purpose of the Bill. That is why hon. Members with a real interest in Scottish education will join us in the Lobby to vote against the Bill.

8.48 pm

Dr Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): This has been a fascinating debate, particularly for the speeches of Conservative Members. Unanimity on this side of the House is to be expected when Scottish business is being discussed. I was amazed by the number of veiled criticisms by Conservative Members, although they desperately tried at the same time to justify their support for the Government.

I am reminded as much as anything else of the warring factions in the Lebanon, which are united only in their dislike of Israel and their hatred of each other. One can see sitting on the Conservative Benches the Sunnis, the

traditionalists from Kincardine and Deeside and Dumfries voicing their traditionalist views about our excellent Scottish education system, behind the Shi'ites on the Front Bench wanting to tear up the tradition. We even have a solitary Druze, from North Tayside, who unfortunately has deserted us.

We have heard a fairly instructive—if not constructive—debate from the Conservative Benches. There was an interesting aside from the Minister. Opening the debate, he talked—I believe that he was speaking ironically—about schools being too important to be left to parents. That is the nub of this evening's argument. Schools are too important an institution to be left merely to parents, or to the staff within them, to decide what should go on inside them.

The real question to which we should turn our minds is the role of the modern school in its community. Its role is not only to educate children, although obviously that remains the primary purpose. It is to serve as a focus for learning and recreation for everyone in the community. That applies equally to a large town school—with its extensive playing fields and facilities such as swimming pools, large gynmasia and games halls—and to a small rural school, which may be the only focus for any community activity in areas that contain no other available hall or meeting place.

The school, then, serves a much wider function. In the course of a year, it may be used by far more people with no direct connection with it as a basic learning institution for their children than merely those involved in education, whether primary or secondary. We ought to focus on the role of the school in the community, and that is my main reason for opposing the Bill.

There are grounds for saying that parents should have a greater say in what goes on in their children's education. I favour that. The Government, indeed, have been taken to the European Court more than once purely to establish that parents have philosophical and moral rights over the way in which their children are educated. Those rights would not, of course, be abrogated by the formation of a school board or any such body. If a parent has the temerity to disagree, that parent will still have the right for his or her view to prevail over those of the school board. That is an important facet of the argument.

We all benefit from good schools, not just the parents who are fortunate enough to see their children pass through them at some point. It should not, therefore, be only a tiny number of parents who have control over a school's activities. Make no mistake: only a small number will become directly involved, in terms both of the small number which it is proposed will serve on the boards, and the small number who will take an interest in what is going on.

I can envisage the procedure laid out for us in the schedules. There will be secret ballots; that is fine. On other occasions, parents will be informed through the medium of a note for children to take home. We can see it, can we not? "Here is a note from the teacher"—and it goes into the school bag. I have seen that several times with both my children. Three weeks later, when I happen to be looking through the bag for something else, out drops the note, and I discover that there was a meeting last week. That is not the most reliable medium for transmitting information about the school.

If that does not happen, what will? Will it all be done by post? How many posts are we talking about in Scotland?

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *rose*——

Dr. Moonie: Just a moment: I am enjoying myself

There are 30,000 or 40,000. That is taking account of the councillors who may be involved. But if we consider all the parents who will send out material in the post, the estimate of £20 million may well prove greatly inadequate in postage alone.

Mr. Bennett: There is a simple solution to the problem of school-home communication. It is a system that I used to operate when I was a schoolmaster. The children are given a tear-off slip which they must bring back to school signed by the parents, saying that they have seen it. The teacher then chases up those who have not brought back the slip.

Dr. Moonie: The hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett), whose views on many things I respect—but not, alas, those that he expresses tonight—has obviously never heard of forgery. I assure him that it is widespread in our experience when tear-off slips are involved, particularly in relation to any disciplinary procedure. I assure hon. Members that that frequently happens, despite the disparaging look from the Minister.

I should like to see more democratic control of local services. I should like more tenants to be involved in the management of housing schemes, and the repairs and services with which they are provided. We have seen examples in many areas, both in England and Scotland—usually under Labour administrations—in which that has proved a resounding success. Like many members of my party, I favour local control of other institutions, such as the police, who again have escaped democratic control. Why should education—or health—be any different? We see no signs of democracy being extended to the Health Service in Scotland. All the board members will continue to be appointed by the Secretary of State. It is amazing how singularly unsuccessful he has been in finding members to promote his point of view. That may be a marker for the future of schools as well.

Many important points in the Bill cause me concern, particularly the power over the use of schools outwith school hours. In my own experience—and that of many others who have served on regional councils and education committees—when we have been involved in the community use of schools, there has often been a conflict between the traditionalists within the school involved in education and those of us who wish the provisions to be widened to include the whole community. That conflict could well be exacerbated by the Bill.

The Bill contains many inadequacies, but I intend to concentrate on only one or two, as I know that other hon. Members wish to speak. The problem of books and materials, for instance, is not that parents should have more control over, or say in, what the head teacher buys; it is that the head teacher has not enough money to spend on books and materials in the first place. That is directly the fault of the Minister and his colleagues, and their attack on the funding of local services over the past few years. It is the fault not of the councils, but of the Government who have failed to provide adequately for the community.

[Dr. Moonie]

Again, information in reports will be linked with the appalling proposals that we have heard, which have yet to find any support except from Conservative Front Benchers. That applies to the testing of children in schools and the construction of league tables stating that one school is better than another, while ignoring the fact that such information is meaningless without any proper psychological, social or economic analysis of the schools concerned. I have mentioned the use of premises, and the conflict involved. Are the people who use them out of hours—hundreds of individuals, and scores of clubs and other organisations—any less entitled to a say in how the schools are organised? Of course they are not.

As we have said, there are aspects that we would like extended, in which parents could be constructively involved: for example, in setting up a school disciplinary policy, and the policy on school uniforms. Those things are not covered by the Bill. In relatively minor areas such as that, parents could be constructively involved.

The ethos of the school should reflect the wishes of the people in the area and not just the parents who happen to send their children to the school. To confine the elections for a school board—if we are to have elected school boards—to parents is to weaken the system. It involves too small a percentage of the electorate and it involves horrendous difficulties in identification.

In some schools in my constituency we calculate that 15 per cent. to 20 per cent. of children come from one-parent families. That does not mean that the other parent has ceased to exist but that they are living somewhere else. Surely they are still entitled to a say in their child's education. How will such people be identified? We are talking about a great number of people. It will be difficult to ensure that they are identified and the provisions in the Bill on identification will be difficult to carry out.

I believe that the proposals give head teachers and a handful of parents inordinate control over schools. I do not believe that they are democratic. I do not believe that they form the best way forward for Scottish education and I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will join us in opposing them.

8.59 pm

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): As a Welsh Member of Parliament, I am delighted to take part in a debate on Scottish legislation, because as taxpayers my constituents pay towards the Scottish education system as they do towards the English and Welsh system. This is a United Kingdom Parliament and it is right that hon. Members from all parts of the country should take part in the debate. I spent most of my professional life in education, so I am pleased to comment on the Bill. I have been a schoolmaster, a local authority education officer and a local authority education committee member.

Although the English and Welsh system differs from the Scottish system, the process of education in Scotland is the same as in England and Wales. Therefore, I welcome the Bill as a modest step forward. I see Opposition Members shaking their heads. The process of teaching children is the same in Scotland as in England and Wales. The system is different, but they do not teach children in Scotland any differently from the way in which children are taught in England and Wales. That is the crux of the matter. If hon. Members had listened they would have heard me refer to "the process of education".

This is a modest Bill. It comes as a surprise to English and Welsh Members that Scotland appears to have been in a time warp on governing bodies. Governing bodies have been in existence in English and Welsh schools for many years and have worked extremely well. The system has given a measure of devolution to schools and a measure of power to parents. It should be enjoyed by Scottish parents as well.

This is a small mouse of a Bill. It is the first step towards shifting the power in education from the producers to the consumers. I welcome that. Parental choice means that schools will no longer be able to ignore the wishes of parents. The common sense that most parents have when it comes to the education of their children is something that we should value, and we should ensure that schools use it. So many of the trendy educational ideas of the past 40 years would not have taken place had the professionals listened to parents in the first place. Therefore, I welcome the fact that Scotland is to have governing bodies, and that there will be a role for parents.

Standards and quality cannot be as high in a system in which parents do not have any influence as they are in one in which parents do have some say. Parents are concerned about standards and quality, and if they are to be on governing bodies they will be able to ask questions about how the school is performing. That cannot be anything but good.

The Bill is, as I have said, a modest Bill. Clause 17 on page 11 deals with financial delegation. I was amazed to see that a school board will be entitled to make representations to an education authority concerning the statements required for the purposes of the running costs of the school. That is a modest measure and it is far behind what is embodied in the Education Refom Bill. It is a first step.

In clause 15 I was amazed to see how limited the powers of school governing bodies will be in comparison with those in English and Welsh schools. There is a long list in clause 15(2), running from (a) to (g), of things that a school governing body in Scotland may not do. Therefore, there is some substance to the criticism of Opposition Members that the Bill does not go far enough. I agree with that. However, in that case I would be interested to know why Opposition Members are not following up the point of principle by supporting the Bill and seeking to amend it in Committee.

The speeches from Opposition Members have not opposed the principle of the Bill. In the debate so far, even from the Front Bench spokesmen, we have heard no speeches about the principle of the Bill. That is what a Second Reading should be about. In fact, I took a note of the speech of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). He stood up at 5.1 pm. By 5.18 pm, he had not mentioned the contents of the Bill. We had 17 minutes on opting out, which is not mentioned in the Bill. At 5.18 pm, 15 hon. Members were present. That is a measure of the opposition to the Bill, when 15 out of 50 Opposition Members are present.

Mr. Norman Hogg: Where are the Scottish Tories?

Mr. Bennett: The hon. Gentleman asks about the Scottish Tories. During speeches by Front Bench

spokesmen from both sides of the House, four of the five Conservative Back Benchers were present. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Mr. Fairbairn) is ill in hospital and cannot be present, but every other hon. Member is here. On the Opposition side, 12 Labour Members were present to hear the speech of the hon. Member for Garscadden. That is how much they oppose the Bill. The 50 Scottish Labour Members of Parliament are supposed to be fighting on the beaches for Scottish legislation.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: They were on the beach.

Mr. Bennett: The Minister says that hon. Gentlemen were on the beach. They may well have been. They certainly were not in the Chamber during the hon. Member for Garscadden's speech.

At 5.18 pm precisely, the hon. Member for Garscadden started to deal with the Bill. But that was only for 30 seconds and he continued to refer to opting out. At 5.21 pm, he was back on the Bill—I noticed that the hon. Gentleman is opting out now. He continued until 5.30 and then, having given the Bill nine minutes of his study, he returned to the subject of opting out until 5.38 pm. That is a measure of the paucity of argument by Opposition Members. In a speech lasting 37 minutes, the Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland found nine minutes to speak on the Bill.

But that is not surprising when one reads comments by Opposition Members concerning parental devolution. They seem to be confused about whether they are in favour of that. The hon. Member for Garscadden, who has now left us and opted out, said in *The Scotsman* on 13 August 1987:

"The Labour party strongly supports the principle of democratic control."

It accepts that

"there is a case for rethinking many assumptions about education. Schools should not be a closed world where children are handed over to the professionals."

I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman.

Unfortunately, that view has not been followed by the Labour party in Scotland. Where it is in power, there has been a very different set of assumptions and behaviour. For example, taking the Strathclyde region and the closure of Paisley grammar school, more than 10,000 letters of objection to its closure have been written. Councillor Gray, the leader of Strathclyde regional council, has said about parental involvement in the decision about Paisley grammar school:

"The aggressive stance of parents over the controversial review of schools provision in Paisley is insulting, insensitive and quite intolerable."

That is what the Labour party in power really believes about parental involvement and parents' views. The party does not believe, when it comes down to it, in giving parents a say.

Therefore, the Labour party has tabled this weasel amendment. Hon. Gentlemen could not bring themselves to oppose the Bill outright on Second Reading. They could not find anything to oppose in this modest Bill, so they say that the Bill only pays lip service to the genuine need for parental involvement in Scottish schools. Yet, where they are in power and there is an opportunity for parents to protest, as they have done in Paisley, the Labour party is not interested. It does not want to know. It is interesting to see the difference between the reality of Labour power and what appears on the Order Paper.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): While my hon. Friend is on the subject of the Opposition amendment, does he get any encouragement from the fact that the Opposition believe that the measure, however humble, is a small step in the direction of allowing schools to opt out? Does he hope that our hon. and right hon. Friends on the Front Bench will be prepared to take these small steps with us?

Mr. Bennett: My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) anticipates some remarks I shall make in a moment. I am sure that the Minister will also take note of what my hon. Friend has said.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), who is not here, spoke on behalf of what I believe was called last week the Social and Liberal Democratic party. I apologise for missing the hon. Gentleman's speech, due to a prior engagement, but I was here for his earlier intervention, when he accused parents who want choice of choosing schools on the basis of "snob value". It is an interesting illustration of how the Liberal party, or whatever it is now called, views parental choice. What has happened to the Liberal party's values of pluralism, diversity, choice in education—all the things that the former Liberal party stood for? What has happened to the great Liberal traditions?

It is very interesting to look back to the philosophy of the Liberal party in the 19th century, to the true Liberals, to John Stuart Mill, that great Scotsman, who said, in his essay "On Liberty"——

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You have an excellent reputation for bringing hon. Members to order. There are four Scots Members who wish to speak. Is going back to a treatise by Mill relevant to the present discussion?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I am waiting to see just how relevant it is.

Mr. Bennett: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is very relevant, because I am showing that the Liberal party's opposition to this Bill is at total variance with everything that it has stood for during the past 200 years. It just shows how the Liberal party has prostituted its own principles recently. I was just going to quote from "On Liberty" to show that John Stuart Mill, the 19th-century Liberal Member of Parliament, set out clearly the principles of his party when he said:

"That the whole or any large part of the education of the people should be in State hands, I go as far as anyone in depreciating. All that has been said of the importance of individuality of character, and diversity of opinions and modes of conduct, involves, as of the same unspeakable importance, diversity of education."

What surprises me is the way in which the Liberal party, every time a Bill comes before the House to give parents more choice or to extend diversity in education, votes against it, as it did on direct grant schools some years ago.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire talks about opting out. I regret that it is not in this Bill. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister responsible for education in Scotland, whose principles on this subject are well known, whom I have known since we were undergraduates and whose view on the central issue of parental control is well known to us, will succeed in ensuring that next year a Bill on opting out comes before the House. It is clear that if parents want to opt out, they

[Mr. Bennett]

will vote for it when given the opportunity. If, as Opposition Members say, they do not want to opt out, they will not vote for it. But they should at least have the opportunity to make the choice.

Opting out would also create a third force in education, create another strand of education between the state-maintained sector of the local educational authorities and the private sector, a third force which will give yet another opportunity for diversification and experimentation. That is something that all of us who are concerned about education will welcome.

Mr. Forth: Does my hon. Friend agree with me that it would be completely in accord with arguments often made by Opposition Members about devolution of power and decision-making if we were to devolve power and decision-making to parents in schools? Is he as much at a loss as I am as to why Opposition Members can oppose the excellent principle of devolution in schools, yet apparently propose it for Scotland as a whole? How does he resolve that apparent contradiction?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I very much hope that the hon. Gentleman will not take up that challenge, but will confine his remarks to the Bill before the House.

Mr. Bennett: I take your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the conundrum posed by my hon. Friend reminds me of the character in "Alice Through the Looking-Glass" who says,

"When I use a word . . . it means just what I choose it to mean".

The Bill is a modest first step on the road to improving parental choice. I look forward to further legislation from the Scottish Office in line with the legislation which has been put forward for England and Wales.

9.13 pm

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): I want to make only brief reference to the contribution of the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett): it combined richly ignorance and arrogance. I sincerely hope that the hon. Member was a better teacher in his school than he is a student of Scottish education. It clearly highlights the contempt in which the Government hold Scottish education that we have had to listen to such speeches not only from the Government Back Benches but from the Government Front Bench.

The debate has been overshadowed by two ideological developments in the last few weeks. First, there was the cheque-book-choice statement made by the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) in a recent debate in Scotland on education, which was in many ways an exposé of Government thinking in relation not only to the private sector but, I believe, to what they would like to see in the public sector in the months and years ahead. Secondly, there was the extraordinary exchange of letters between the Secretary of State for Scotland's office and the Prime Minister. The credit-card curriculum was put on the agenda for the first time. An important debate on Scottish affairs, Scottish education and the future of Scottish children has been overshadowed by the ideological adventures of the hon. Member for Stirling, aided and abetted by the arch-ideologue at No. 10.

Clearly Opposition Members are interested in extending parental choice. There is a consensus in Scotland among teachers, parents, pupils, education authorities, teaching unions and the Labour party that parental involvement should be extended. The essential weakness of the Government's argument is that they confuse school boards with extended parental choice. Our argument, put simply, is this. If there is a consensus within Scotland on the need to extend parental involvement in our schools, is that not the best basis on which to build? But this Government will have none of that; co-operation and consensus must always give way to conflict. So, instead of taking what is a very sensible consensus and developing it, they are putting forward school boards as the panacea for further parental involvement in Scottish schools.

It is also important to put on the record the fact that nobody on the Government Benches will praise the quality of Scottish education. It is an outrage and a disgrace that those on the Government Front Bench are unwilling to recognise that Scottish education is offering, and will continue to offer, some of the best quality education to be found in Europe. It is that which is now under threat, not only from the imposition of school boards but from the cuts, the haranguing of teachers, and the prolonging of the strike by the Government. All these factors have contributed to the very delicate situation in Scottish education and Scottish schools.

When looking at the Bill, we have to consider the hidden agenda. Clearly two major attacks are taking place. The hon. Member for Stirling can laugh, and that may exhaust his capabilities on this subject, but this is a major attack on professional competence in schools and on local democracy in the sense of regional councils being able to work with parents to determine the future of their education programmes. It comes back to the ideological confusion that exists in the Government's mind. Why on earth can they not allow the consensus in Scotland to develop incrementally over the next two or three years so that we can take the best school councils and allow them to prosper and take the best management committees and community schools and let them develop? And why can we not, in primary schools and elsewhere, provide a suitable framework within which local democracy and parental involvement can flourish and we can see the emergence of many of the things which have been raised in this debate but which will not emerge because of the imposition of the Government's school board proposals?

If something positive is required from the Opposition, may I say that I believe that we need legislation to extend the rights of parents as individuals to have greater access and information and much greater involvement in the work going on in schools. I am a parent of a girl of 12 and a boy of 14, and they have been given the best education possible within the Fife school system. I do not want to sack staff, appoint staff or decide the number of pencils, rulers and rubbers in a class; I am more interested in my own children. That is the essence of parental involvement —ensuring that one looks after the interests of one's own children and that the school environment is constructive, sensitive, and sympathetic to their individual needs and also to the type of educational philosophies and theories that the EIS, teachers and education authorities are dealing with very ably in Scotland.

The Bill is a mess. It is bigoted and bizarre and will contribute nothing to the welfare of children or of schools;

indeed, it will ensure that there will be a battle over the next two or three years when sensible, constructive policies could have been built on consensus. I hope that many Government Back Benchers will see the sense of our arguments and will come with us into the Division Lobby to defeat a thoroughly bad Bill.

9.20 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): First, I wish to ask why priority has not been given to the real problem of Scottish education, such as the maintenance of schools. In my constituency, as in many others, academies are falling apart for want of simple maintenance. That for many of us is the first priority.

My second question concerns the cost of the proposals. Is it £5 million or is it, as the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) and Mrs. Smith of Dumfries and Galloway have said, £20 million? Dumfries has worked out its sums but it is far from clear whether the Scottish Office has done anything of the kind.

Thirdly, will the Minister in his reply to the debate say something more about the legal position? Throughout the debate and in the Bill it has become clearer and clearer that school boards will have some say in the appointment of headmasters and, therefore, surely in dismissals and staff negotiations. Once this is introduced into the equation there are legal problems. Perhaps he did not have time, but in his opening remarks the Secretary of State did not explain the real worries of many teachers about the legal implications of being employed not by a local authority but by an employer who does not have the full power of an employer because the school board will have some power in the matter. I see my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan), who was Secretary of State, nodding. Anyone who has gone through the Scottish education system can easily understand the problems that will arise.

Finally, I refer to an answer which I received this afternoon to the following question:

"To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is now taking to safeguard the confidentiality of information in his Department, in the light of the unauthorised disclosure of correspondence on opting-out of the educational system between No. 10 Downing street and his office; and if he will make a statement."

The Secretary of State replied:

"The measures taken in the Scottish Office to protect official information are in accordance with standards laid down for application throughout Government Departments. The circumstances of the unauthorised disclosure of recent correspondence between the Prime Minister's office and my own are being investigated."

With what success are they being investigated because some of us think that Ministers know very well how this occurred? May we hear just a little more about the role of No. 10 Downing street in all this?

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) for giving me the opportunity to speak.

9.23 pm

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Today's debate has been dominated and influenced to some extent by issues which are not in the Bill. We have admitted that all through the debate. Latterly I thought that the debate fell apart a little because of a failure of the Government Whips, who dragooned in to speak two of the worst speakers in the House, the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett), who does not know where Paisley is, and the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon), who went on about choice, except of course the choice of the electorate in Scotland at the general election, which he did not mention. I am sure that the electors of Pembroke and of Darlington will be interested to read the speeches about Scottish education and will ask themselves what sort of bargain they have got. There may be some in Pembroke who will think that Desmond Donnelly would have been a better choice than the hon. Member for Pembroke.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Will my hon. Friend allow me to put the record straight? The hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) is not from Pembroke; he is from London and merely represents Pembroke.

Mr. Hogg: It appears that the Tory party's fortunes in Wales have faded as much as they did in Scotland—they have to import these Anglos to do the job.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Racism.

Mr. Hogg: It was a reference to the English, which is perfectly respectable in a Scottish debate.

The extraordinary and amazing exchange of correspondence between the Cabinet Office and the Scottish Office has also featured strongly in the debate. I was surprised that the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) did not take the opportunity to tell us that he would not be pressing his amendment in Committee in view of all that has been said by the Government Front Bench. Perhaps he might clarify the position now, but I should have thought that after having heard the Secretary of State for Scotland, whom the hon. Gentleman faithfully served at one time, he would be willing not to press his amendment for opting out. We shall find that out in Committee.

Hon. Members have mentioned the plans for testing and the curriculum, which no one wants or asked for. I thought that the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) made some useful comments about that. We also heard a great deal about the Minister's involvement in school closures, not for educational ends but to serve to bolster the fading fortunes of the Tory party in Scotland.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) spoke with great commitment and conviction on behalf of his constituents, and we welcome that. My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) properly stated the case for the schools in Paisley and drew the correct conclusion on how best to proceed. The best way to proceed is not for the Minister to play politics with children's education in Paisley.

The real agenda for education is probably best defined in the Education Reform Bill, to which the hon. Member for Pembroke referred. That, plus the preference for cheque-book education, which the Parliamentary Under-Secretary has tried to make respectable, is what the Government are about. The debate was certainly strongly influenced by that hidden agenda and manifesto.

The Tory party's education policies in Scotland now stand exposed. The leak in the newspapers has left the Secretary of State looking a somewhat battered figure, as he is pushed from pillar to post by the Prime Minister and senior civil servants at the Scottish Office. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary was described by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) as being second fiddle at the Scottish Office. I have

[Mr. Hogg]

always thought of him as being the first violin, orchestrating events in the Department. Nothing that we have heard today has persuaded us that that is not so.

The starting point when evaluating any education legislation must be: does it enhance the quality of education provision in any way? The answer in this case must surely be no. Underneath its claim to increase parent power the Bill is designed further to advance the views of the Tory party and is consistent with more Thatcherism, not less, as we have been promised by the Secretary of State. Despite what he says, it will help to de-professionalise—if that is a word—education, with the powers that it proposes. There is little doubt that the reintroduction of the word "board", which disappeared from school life 60 years ago in Scotland, is wholly consistent with the adherence to Victorian ideas of management and values.

The Bill will set parents against teachers and is about paving the way for the opting out of schools. We believe that, and I think that the Prime Minister believes it because she seemed to suggest it in her interview on Scottish television. There is little of education value in the Bill, but that is not surprising because it is a means to an end. It helps to explain why the Bill is devoid of merit and why education considerations seem to have taken a back seat.

We all remember the original proposals that were produced in August. They were so badly worked out that they brought down on the head of the Minister the criticism of everyone concerned with education. According to the Educational Institute of Scotland's analysis of the school board consultation, only 1 per cent. of returns were in favour and 95 per cent. of parents were opposed. That was a case of parents exercising their right of choice. The Government and the Minister lost the argument and the Minister then brought forward the Bill.

Some of the more ridiculous suggestions in the original proposals are still in the Bill, or at least there is a hint of them that worries us. That is certainly true in respect of senior appointments in the schools. There is no consent to that proposal and as far as I can see it leaves in place the veto that we are worried about. It does nothing to persuade me that the Government are not intent on shifting the appointment of head teachers and senior staff from the education authorities and into the hands of school boards. There was unanimous opposition to the original proposal. Of course it was different, but none the less the Government seem to be pressing on with a similar proposal in the Bill.

There is no doubt that the Government's proposals for a parental majority on the boards does not find consent among parents. Indeed, Strathclyde School Councils' Parents Federation called it divisive and likely to drive a wedge between parents and teachers. That same sentiment was expressed by the Church of Scotland in its submission to the Government and the Association of Directors of Education expressed the same sentiment. As far as we can gather, the whole of Scotland's concerned education establishment, if its members will forgive me for calling it that, has made it quite clear that it is not in favour of parents having a majority on these boards. Neither is the Opposition. We take the view that there should be a partnership between parents, teachers, the education authorities and the community. Anything else is to give power to a vested interest in a situation where that is not appropriate. I hope that in Committee the Minister will carefully consider our submissions and amendments to deal with that.

Parents certainly want to be involved. We have never denied that and are strongly in favour of it. The 1986 regional elections in Strathclyde, the largest education authority in the country, were fought on a manifesto that promised one school council for each school. We do not dissent from the proposal for one school board for each school. The suggestion that somehow or other we have only now formulated ideas for promoting parental interest is quite wrong. Any reference to the published manifesto for the 1986 regional elections in Strathclyde will prove that to be the case.

When he is winding up the Minister must clarify the matter of cost. Under the Bill about 32,000 people in Scotland will be able to draw expenses against the budgets of regional education authorities. We are talking about electing 32,000 people to serve on school boards and that will cost a great deal of money. The suggestion that it will cost only £5 million makes me wonder what kind of arithmetic is taught in the Adam Smith Institute. It does not seem to me to require a great grasp of arithmetic to come to the conclusion that the £20 million spoken of by the Dumfries and Galloway education authority is much nearer the mark. I would far rather listen to the cautious Conservatives of Dumfries and Galloway than the more radical elements which have found their way into this House. When the Minister winds up, I hope that he will address the question of cost and will tell us plainly just what is involved in that regard.

I take the view that the Bill is not a response to a particular Scottish demand because there is no particular Scottish problem. Parents have access to education authorities. They have access to the schools in Scotland through the existing school councils and, where those are less active—I accept that, in many parts of the country, they have not proved to be a success, and that the system requires examination—they have access through parent-teacher associations, open days, parents' evenings and all the other events in which many of us become involved as local Members of Parliament. School councils in that context appear to have been conveniently forgotten, along with the Macbeth report, which aimed at reforming them and increasing parental involvement. I am surprised that we have heard so little about that today. Surely that would be a far better basis for introducing real parent power, which we all accept has to come, and the time is opportune to introduce it. We do not believe that Scottish parents will consent to the use of this measure to achieve another objective.

I found it quite amazing that, in the exchange of letters between the Prime Minister's Private Office and the Private Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland, we were told that we would be having an education Bill next year which would present proposals for opting out. We were even told what the name of the Bill would be. As a Member of Parliament, I find it amazing that senior civil servants can exchange letters of that kind and tell the Executive how to behave, when we are trailing along behind not knowing what is going on behind the scenes.

That is not good enough. It is consistent with the Government's commitment to secrecy. They do not like telling people what is going on. That is why we know that what is being proposed here is a fraud. That was certainly

confirmed by the reply that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) brought to the attention of the House a few minutes ago.

I have no hesitation this evening on calling on my right hon. and hon. Friends to decline to give the Bill a Second Reading. In view of the rather infantile and silly debating techniques deployed by the hon. Member for Darlington and his foolish hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke, we shall now discuss the money resolution. In the words of the reasoned amendment, the Bill

"pays only lip service to the genuine need to encourage parental involvement."

It is divisive. It has been rejected by educational opinion. It destroys the distinctive qualities and traditions of Scottish education and I call upon my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote for our reasoned amendment, to vote against the Second Reading, to vote for the Liberal amendment and to vote on the money resolution.

9.38 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I am somewhat bemused by the Labour party's position on this matter tonight. The Opposition amendment criticises the Bill on the basis that it

"pays only lip service to the genuine need to encourage parental involvement in Scotland's schools, will divide parents and teachers"

and

"has been rejected by educational opinion."

Yet, when our proposals enshrined in the Bill were announced in January, the leader of the Educational Institute of Scotland, John Pollock, speaking on Radio 4, said:

"the changes in the revised proposals, transformed the Boards into a workable idea which will help develop a constructive partnership between parents and teachers ... the Government has been overwhelmed by the public response."

Mr. Douglas: He had not seen the Bill.

Mr. Forsyth: I can tell the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) that we have not heard a single argument from Opposition Members tonight showing that the Bill does nothing other than implement the proposals that we promised to make.

The Scottish Consumer Council represents consumers in Scotland. Its verdict is contained in a letter to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland dated 8 April, which states:

"My colleagues are most impressed not only by the contents of the School Boards (Scotland) Bill which follow closely and in impressive detail the proposals announced in January but also by the way the legislation is drafted. It is a model of clarity and coherence. More than any other legislation that comes to mind, it conveys to the reader a clear picture of how the new system will work."

That may account for why we have not heard a single speech which has done other than refer to what is not in the Bill or made passing reference to it and there has been no contribution from any Opposition Member to justify the Opposition's decision to vote against the Second Reading.

Mr. Dewar: Perhaps it is a little unfair to ask the Minister this. However, as he is so impressed by the Scottish Consumer Council's advice on these matters, does he give equal weight to what it says about the poll tax regulations?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman's problem is that he appears to take the view of the Scottish Consumer Council selectively. I merely use the council to endorse its view that our original proposals which the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) welcomed as a major climbdown by the Government and a victory for public opinion in Scotland should be included in the Bill.

In response to claims made tonight about lip service, I must state that the Government have done something for parents instead of paying lip service to parental involvement in schools. The whole thrust of our education policy since we took office has been directed towards giving parents a better deal from the services which most of them use and for which most of them pay as ratepayers and taxpayers.

Our earlier measures were directed towards improving the range of choice for parents through the parents' charter legislation and the assisted places scheme. However, there has been a widely recognised unmet need for a much better two-day flow of communication between parents and schools. If we had done nothing to reform the school council system, no doubt we would have been roundly criticised. The proposals that we published for consultation last August have changed the ground for debate. The proposals caused the EIS in its response to admit:

"The role of parents in Scottish education is one of the areas in which the Scottish educational system is not pre-eminent and indeed lags behind the systems of other countries."

The proposals drew a set of counter-proposals from COSLA, starting with the proposition that every school should have a school council, including schools with fewer than 100 pupils. If we had not brought the proposals forward or if we had put forward proposals such as those put forward by COSLA, the Opposition would have opposed them, claiming that they were too difficult, too troublesome and expensive.

It is high time that Opposition Members turned their attention to the interests of parents as consumers and recognised that the education establishment has been patronising parents for far too long. Parents have a right to choose what they judge is best for their children. We know that parents are well able to tell a good school from a bad one when making their choice.

The Bill seeks to release the latent interest of parents in the schools attended by their children because any responsible parent wants to see his children's school improved. That can only be to the good of the system. The Bill provides a straightforward and workable framework within which parents can exert a beneficial pressure on the system. It is also a framework in which a genuine partnership between parents and teachers can be formed.

Mr. McLeish *rose*——

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to make some progress, I shall give way.

The Bill will require parents to learn a lot about what teachers are trying to achieve for their children and it will require teachers to formulate their own aims and objectives in clear terms and to put them across persuasively. It should be a salutary experience for both parties.

Opposition Members may bluster and fulminate because that is what they think they are supposed to do, but in their hearts they know that when this measure is on

[Mr. Forsyth]

the statute book everybody concerned with education—local authorities, teachers and parents—will want to get on and make a success of the boards to the great benefit of everyone in Scottish education.

The hon. Member for Garscadden spent 17 minutes of his speech discussing opting out, which is not included in the Bill. Indeed, he went so far as to accuse me of being dishonest in what I had had to say on opting out. As long ago as last summer we were making it clear that we would not rule out opting out in the long run.

The hon. Gentleman has said in this debate that there is no support in Scotland for opting out. If there is no support for opting out in Scotland, why is he so afraid of it? The hon. Gentleman said that opting out would damage Scottish education. How could opting out damage Scottish education if no one was interested in it, if no one was going to opt out?

Mr. Dewar: The Minister did not listen to my speech.

Mr. Forsyth: Most of the hon. Gentleman's speech was not about the Bill.

The amendment, to which the hon. Gentleman's name is added, criticises the Bill for paying only lip service. It says that it does not go far enough. Yet every point that the hon. Gentleman made in criticism of the Bill was designed to reduce parental influence and parental rights. He said that there should be no parental majority and yet the whole purpose of the Bill is to give parents a forum in education, which they have been denied for too long. He said that parents should not have a right to confirm the head teacher's capitation proposals. Yet in January he welcomed our proposals, enshrined in the Bill, which provide exactly that. He was against ballots of parents. Where a majority of parents were in favour of taking additional delegated powers, he was against those delegated powers being given.

The lip service comes from the Opposition. They say that they are in favour of parental involvement provided that parents have no influence or power and the power remains in the hands of the producers in education.

Mr. McLeish: I am a politician and a parent. These proposals will do nothing for me as a parent because, apart from the ideological adventures of the exercise, as a parent, I would rather have legislative rights for information on and access to a range of activities relating to the school. I do not want to run the school. What will these board proposals do for me?

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman takes the trouble to read the Bill, he will find that under clause 12 the school boards will have a duty to provide exactly that sort of information. Fortunately for Scottish education, most parents do not take the view that they are interested only in their own children's education.

The hon. Member for Garscadden said that parents only would be involved in appointments. If he studies the Bill, he will find that that is incorrect. Teacher members of the school boards will not be involved in appointments, but parents and co-opted members will be. It would be singularly inappropriate for members of staff to be involved in appointments of staff in the same school.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) talked about cheque books, which had all the Opposition Members jumping up and down. They need to recognise that the system which they defend in voting against the Bill tonight is a system where choice is limited to those who can afford to pay twice—once through taxation, and once through their cheque books. The Bill is about providing choice and the opportunity to influence what happens in schools for those who have no cheque books and cannot afford to pay twice. Labour Members are opposed to that because they wish those people to remain under the thumb and under the control of Labour-controlled local authorities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) asked why the Opposition will vote against the Bill tonight. In a slip, the hon. Member for Garscadden gave away the answer when he said that the Educational Institute of Scotland does not want the Bill to receive a Second Reading. When he was pressed, he said that the problem with the Bill was not that it was going too far, but that it was going the wrong way.

Yet in January, when we announced the proposals, the hon. Member for Garscadden, in an interview on BBC television, said:

"Well, I'm delighted that they have retreated—in some disorder I may say so, and it's a tremendous victory for the teachers, for the parents and I think for Scottish public opinion. We said in the very beginning that Michael Forsyth had hijacked some very sensible discussions about how we strengthened parent participation in the life of a school and I think we've been totally justified by the fact that most of these proposals have now been dropped in a somewhat embarrassed fashion."

It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman made such a proud boast, yet he is not prepared to vote for the Bill.

Mr. Galbraith: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Forsyth: No. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to get on. There were a couple of serious points made by hon. Members during the debate.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) asked what would be the position of feeder primary schools being able to operate in conjunction with secondary schools. There is no provision in the Bill, but there is nothing to prevent umbrella organisations from being set up or for small schools to come together to discuss matters of mutual interest.

The hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) complained that there was nothing in the Bill to strengthen parental involvement in schools and the parent-teacher associations. Clause 12 places a specific duty on school boards to provide for the formation of parent-teacher associations, and indeed to provide them with information.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and the hon. Members for Garscadden, for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg), and for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) all asked about the question of costs. I pay tribute to the submissions made by Dumfries and Galloway as part of the consultation exercise, and to the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth who said that he preferred their judgment to mine. Dumfries and Galloway announced that it is to establish a pilot scheme setting up school boards ahead of the legislation, so I agree with its judgment. The costs estimate which Dumfries and Galloway produced appeared to ignore a number of factors. We have made an estimate of £5 million as the net cost after savings from abolishing school councils. Many authorities are having to develop financial information on

a school-by-school basis anyway and that was included in COSLA's estimates of costs. The fact that delegated functions will not be available to all boards at the outset but will happen at the board's own pace makes it extremely difficult to come to a conclusion on costs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries was also worried about the question of charging. May I assure him that the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 makes it unlawful for any charges to be made for the provision of education, but, if it will help my hon. Friend, may I say that I take his point about clarity and I shall be perfectly happy to look again at the matter in Committee.

The role of councillors is in no way eroded by the establishment of school boards because education authorities will still be responsible for strategic planning in their areas. My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) made the point that the devolution that matters in Scotland is the devolution of power. This devolution of power will be real; it will be devolution to parents of matters that concern their own schools.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) said that he did not want the Prime Minister to interfere in Scottish affairs. He did not support our regulations on school closures, but it is a bit rich of him to tell the House that he does not want the Prime Minister to interfere. It is also a bit rich of him not to support the regulations when the leader of the alliance on Strathclyde regional council has written to me pleading that we should use the regulations to save Notre Dame school.

The hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth quoted the Educational Institute of Scotland survey that claims that 95 per cent. of the responses to the consultation exercise oppose our plans, but what he did not say was that, even when somebody said, "I very much welcome the proposals but I am not very happy about this particular aspect", it was counted as opposition. On that basis, the hon. Member has been misled by the EIS, which has listed as opponents of the package people who were making constructive contributions to the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) made a perfectly proper distinction between the purpose of this Bill and that of opting out. As he said, the Bill is about parental involvement. Opting out is about extending parental choice. The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) torpedoed the whole of the Opposition's case when he said that he thinks that the Bill is so small in scale that he wonders why it is attracting so much attention. My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) pointed out that the English experience has been that where parents are offered real power and responsibility in schools they take that opportunity and become involved.

The Bill is a major step towards redressing the balance in education——

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

Mr. Forsyth —between the real needs of pupils and parents and the convenience of education authority administrators, trade union interests and teachers' organisations.

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) knows better than to try to intervene when it is clear that the Minister is not giving way.

Mr. Forsyth: This Bill is a major step towards creating a responsive, sound and productive education service.

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

Mr. Forsyth: It will provide an opportunity for parents to help to shape the schools that they use to educate their children.

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

Mr. Forsyth: Both schools and children will be the better for it. The Bill gives effect to principles and—

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West knows that he must not persist.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman thinks that he is still at the Labour party conference.

These are firm and positive proposals. The Government have identified a vital issue and have brought forward clear plans to deal with it. What have we heard from the Opposition? They have reiterated the tired views of a defensive education establishment. They have produced airy statements about the rights of individual parents. They have tried to create anxiety about provisions that are not and will not be in the Bill.

The truth is that the Opposition have no alternative policy to offer. They know that the involvement of the people who use the service and decide how it should be provided and run is both right and sensible but, like the authorities and teacher associations to which they are in thrall, they are afraid of change. The key to the provisions in the Bill is the need to make the education service more responsive to those who use it—to pupils, parents and employers. That means making the system more open, producing more information and looking more critically at what is provided. That is in all our interests. I ask the House to support the Bill.

Question put, That the amendment be made:

The House divided: Ayes 203, Noes 260.

Division No. 249] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Bray, Dr Jeremy
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*	Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Allen, Graham	Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Alton, David	Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Armstrong, Hilary	Buchan, Norman
Ashdown, Paddy	Buckley, George J.
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Caborn, Richard
Ashton, Joe	Callaghan, Jim
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Barron, Kevin	Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Battle, John	Canavan, Dennis
Beckett, Margaret	Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Beith, A. J.	Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Bell, Stuart	Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Clay, Bob
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*	Clelland, David
Bermingham, Gerald	Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Bidwell, Sydney	Cohen, Harry
Blair, Tony	Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Boyes, Roland	Corbett, Robin
Bradley, Keith	Corbyn, Jeremy

Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Nigel Griffiths.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Bigge-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Egger, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Killedder, James
Knapman, Roger
Knowles, Michael

Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the noes:
Mr. Alan Howarth and
Mr. David Maclean

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading), and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put,

That the Bill be committed to a Special Standing Committee.—*[Mr. Bruce.]*

The House divided: Ayes 198, Noes 254.

Division No. 250] **[10.14pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis

Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Wallace and
Mr. Archy Kirkwood.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Speld'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Franks, Cecil
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Killedder, James
Knapman, Roger
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd and
Mr. David Maclean.

Question accordingly negatived.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

School Boards (Scotland) [Money]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the School Boards (Scotland) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenses of the Secretary of State under the Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable under any other enactment.—*[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

10.27 pm

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): There are one or two points which I should like to discuss. If the Bill is passed, further developments are forecast, including the opting out of schools. If schools opt out, how will they be paid for? Will the money be raised separately for those schools?

The hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), in advocating an opt-out solution to parents in Paisley, encouraged the publication of a letter calling for consideration to be given to opting out. As my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mr. Adams) will remember, the letter said that, if people supported the proposal to opt out, it would not cost them anything individually. Before we approve the Bill, we should know whether there will be any additional cost if schools opt out, or whether parents will be expected to pay for the running of the school. We must have an answer to that before we continue.

Secondly, has the Minister considered the total amount of money that will be necessary to fund these highly bureaucratic school boards? They are neither popular nor wanted, and it will be difficult too for the Government to convince the people of Scotland that the expense of these unwanted boards is necessary or desirable. What sort of payment to this end is envisaged under the resolution? What will the individual expenses of individual members of the boards be? Will there be a maximum? Will there be loss of wages? Will there be expenses for travel and time off work? All those things must be considered. We want to know about them before we pass the resolution.

Thirdly, what consideration have the Government given to the general implementation of the Bill? What additional resources, apart from those for the members of the boards, will be required? What clerical and secretarial staff will be required? What additional strains will all this put on headmasters? They will not be considered within the general expenditure of the implementation of the boards but will be very much part of the expenditure incurred by school administrations to operate and co-operate with the boards.

These, then, are the reasons why we need answers about the resolution: the additional resources needed for technical aspects; the costs of board members; the issue of who will pay for elections; and, finally, the issue of who will pay for opting out, which will surely be the next stage after this Bill. The hon. Member for Eastwood encouraged the call for opting out in my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mr. Adams). The multiple letter stressed support for the demand for Paisley grammar school to opt out, unless that cost money. In that event, it would be opposed.

10.32 pm

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): The part of the Bill that deals with its financial implications states that the

"overall level of costs will depend largely on the level of functions which individual boards take on, but it is likely to be very small and there will be offsetting savings arising from the abolition of school councils."

If the costs are to be small, we want to know how small. We want more detailed information than we have had from the Minister tonight. He quoted a figure of £5 million, but we are always dubious about figures from the Scottish Office, particularly those that emanate from the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth). They tend to be highly massaged, selective figures, always played down.

We suspect that the Bill's financial implications will be much greater, and we want detailed answers to some of the questions raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan). The Bill's financial implications will apply to all education in Scotland, not only the boards. Nursery education is important to my constituency, in the whole of which there is no nursery education for under-fives. That is a major educational concern of ours. None of that has been dealt with tonight. If money is to be taken away from education authorities to finance the school boards' as yet frequently undefined functions, my constituents need to know what implications that will have for nursery education.

I would be happier about some of these financial aspects had it not been for the way in which the Minister spoke tonight; instead of being generous in spirit, he was his usual bitter, nasty, mean self. He did not speak of education, but tried to settle old scores. We saw the venom with which he spoke about this as he spat across the Chamber. His speech was not about education but simply about settling old scores. The Government will use any devious means, including telling us how much it will cost. The Minister is well known for using devious means and he sails close to the wind. His rules are that if it is legal he will do it, and if it is not legal he will do it anyway as long as he can get away with it. Those are the implications and that is why we need to know the financial aspects of the Bill.

I am concerned about another financial aspect, the appointment of head teachers. That is detailed in schedule 2(10), which says:

"For the purpose of enabling the Board to carry out their functions under paragraphs 9, 11 and 12 of this Schedule, the authority shall supply to the Board such information relating to the applicants for the post as—

(a) the authority have in their possession or can readily obtain; and

(b) the Board may reasonably request."

There are financial implications in that, because the local authority could draw up a short leet which the school board then alters. What information will the school boards have that the local authority will not have that will make the board alter the short leet? On what basis would a school board alter a short leet? We heard nothing about that in the debate, but it is important in terms of the financial resolution because teachers on a short leet may be taken off it. They may raise legal actions against boards if they are taken off the short leet without explanation or for some indeterminate reasons put forward by a school board.

We need to know more about whether the financial resolution is considered in any legal actions that may arise

[Mr. Sam Galbraith]

as a result of the powers envisaged for school boards. We are unhappy with the reassurances, partly because of the dubious practices employed by the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, because of the way in which he always sails close to the wind, his venom, and the way in which this is clearly a settling of old scores. We require answers to these questions.

10.36 pm

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): For a short time I served on the Public Accounts Committee. For that reason, I and other hon. Members are conscious of the fact that we must get value for money. That is why, when we vote money or accede to a money resolution, we have to be clear about what the nation will get in return. The explanation in the Bill about its financial effects is extremely sparse.

On Second Reading we were given two figures. If the difference between them were minuscule, we could disregard it. The Government figure is £5 million. We have heard a figure not from a Labour party source or from what I consider to be a biased source but from a source that the Under-Secretary of State has prayed in aid in another connection—Dumfries and Galloway regional council. Its figure is £20 million. There is a considerable difference between those two figures. The House must have an opportunity to ventilate its views and to get some explanation about that difference in estimated expenditure.

I do not think that Dumfries and Galloway regional council has made up the figure or has embarked on a completely meaningless exercise. The Under-Secretary of State and the Scottish Education Department are considerably underestimating the strains on public expenditure contained in the proposals. Can the Under-Secretary of State tell the House that there will be offsetting savings from the abolition of school councils and what they will be? How much is involved? The Scottish Office should have an idea of that figure. It should know how much will be taken into account in future rate support grant settlements. Those are fair questions for hon. Members to ask.

Above all, we are duty bound to ask whether any of that expenditure will improve Scottish education. I beg to question that. I would not argue that Scottish education is perfect, but I am the husband of a teacher and the father of a teacher and I know the dedication of members of the teaching profession in Scotland to their job. I do not think that money spent in that area will necessarily give us better value for money in return.

Obviously I am in favour of parental interest in education. I speak with some feeling on the subject this evening because my wife, as a teacher, has had a harrowing experience in the past few days, involving one of her young pupils. I do not want to belabour this too much, but one of her pupils was involved in a motor accident as a result of which he died and another pupil was severely injured. I know how much that affected the feelings in my home and the feelings of other teachers in the school.

I should speak only for Fife and my constituency, but, in the main, Scottish teachers are dedicated to the job in hand and the difficulties that they encounter in schools have little to do with education. They have a great deal to do with the type of society that the Under-Secretary wants to perpetrate—a greedy, acquisitive society.

The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) may nod his head, but he is only an aspiring parliamentary private secretary. The really dangerous man in Scottish education and health is the Under-Secretary of State. He is the most dangerous man in the Scottish Office today. I called him a pusillanimous polecat. I was perhaps being over-generous. We must have freedom of speech. We must respect other people's views, but the Under-Secretary of State does not respect other people's views.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): That is not true. My hon. Friend has listened very carefully to all the representations. I should also like to assure the hon. Gentleman that I have no wish to be a parliamentary private secretary.

Mr. Douglas: I do not wish to become involved in discussing the hon. Gentleman's political aspirations.

If the Under-Secretary of State could have got away with his original proposals, he would have done so. Unfortunately, he has got away with his proposals for the poll tax, but that is another issue and I would be called to order if I enlarged on that while we are debating a money resolution. However, we must be clear about the type of character with which we are dealing. We are dealing with someone who will not adhere to the normal conventions of political debate. If the Under-Secretary of State can get his way, he will. Opposition Members must be clear about that and the implications for Scottish education and health.

Tonight we are dealing with education. There is nothing in the proposals that will enhance the quality of Scottish education. On the money resolution we must ask ourselves whether this will be money well spent. We have been told by the Under-Secretary of State that the proposals deal with parental control. I asked the Minister to give way on that point earlier and I hope that I have got him right as I do not want to misquote him. If they deal with parental control, the next stage—opting out—will deal with parental choice. The proposals represent the first stage of a two-stage rocket. If we grant permission to spend money on the Bill, we will be taking an important step.

Whatever the qualities or deficiencies of the Scottish education system, it has had the characteristic of preserving a sense of community and identity. Although I have said this before, I emphasise that I am one of the few hon. Members on either side of the House who left school at 14. I realise the value of education and the education process. If we inject self-aggrandisement and acquisitiveness into the system, we will destroy the essential characteristics of Scottish education.

I want to refer to a leading article in *The Economist* which the Minister might find attractive. It should be read by all hon. Members and especially by Opposition Members. It shows clearly that the thrust of the Thatcherite revolution—if I can dignify it in those terms—is to promote the standards and outlook of south-east England in Scotland and elsewhere. We do not want that. If we desired that, we would have moved south-east. The Minister's experience of local government comes from the city of Westminister. He has no experience of Stirling, Fife, Strathclyde or Grampian. The Minister's value-for-money outlook is not shared in Scotland.

Many schools would refer to the expenditure involved in the Bill in terms of gross national product. The Minister must explain why we have heard estimates of the costs varying between £20 million and £5 million. What we are debating now may have no impact or effect on the form of education in schools. I believe that, with their background, Scottish teachers will resist what the Minister and the Government are trying to impose on them.

The dislocation still exists. That is why I believe that we must resist the aura of opting out. The Tories want opting out because they know that it will divide us. Opting out will be divisive and it will make people atomistic and selfish. That is not value for money. It is destructive and it appeals to the selfish outlook that people in other areas of society have called wicked and selfish. If we follow that path, we will destroy the cohesion in Scottish society. We should resist all the attitudes and ideas in the Bill with all the force that we can command.

10.48 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): It is important to discuss the financial effects of the Bill because it is one of the many aspects on which Ministers have been reticent. They say that the cost of setting up the school boards will be in the region of £5 million. They dispute COSLA's figure of £20 million. If the school boards are to work properly and do everything that they are told they should do, they will cost a great deal more than £5 million.

As I said earlier, I served on three school councils in the six years that I was on the education committee of Lothian regional council. I suspect that I have more experience of serving on school councils than any Government supporter. They know as little about school councils as they know about the schools that we are discussing tonight, because most of them have chosen to send their children to the schools in the private sector. *[Interruption.]*

I would be interested if any Conservative Member could name one governing body of a private school that is run predominantly by parents who have children currently at the school. The fact is that those governing bodies are comprised of parents of former pupils and of other interested parties. That is something that the Government seem to ignore when they talk about having a preponderance of parents of pupils currently at the school. They should be aware of the difficulties and the invidious position in which parents of current pupils would find themselves.

Mr. Buchan: Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to correct the annoying belief of Conservative Members that, because he was sent by his parents to a fee-paying school, he is somehow guilty?

Mr. Darling: I have always found it interesting that Conservative Members are often keen to refer to that matter, but it does not worry me. Having been to an institution of that nature, I am in a good position to comment on its defects. I suspect that if I had not been educated in such an institution, any criticisms I offered would be denounced as having been made without experience. I am in a good position to make some good criticisms of such institutions.

Each member of the school boards will be able to claim allowances. That is important because if parents and school board members are expected to run schools properly they will have to spend some considerable time getting to know the school, the intricacies of the modern curriculum and maintenance and how to distinguish between income and capital, let alone mastering Munn and Dunning, the Pack report, curriculum assessment, and so on. All that needs time.

If we do not pay proper allowances and accept the fact that parents and others will have to take considerable time off work—if they are lucky enough to work—and that they may incur expense, those people will be severely disadvantaged and will not be able to run schools in the way that the Government envisage.

I spent a number of years as a governor of Napier college in Edinburgh. Almost total financial responsibility there was given to the governing body and it was necessary for each of us to spend considerable time grappling with the intricacies of college finance. If one cannot devote the time and energy that is required, one is simply paying lip service to governors or school board members being able to run schools. It is a fact that, unless one is familiar with the curriculum and financing of schools, one will be guided by the advice offered by the head teacher and other staff.

That brings me to my second point. I readily admit that school councils have weaknesses, one of which is that they are dominated by teachers. Time and again it was obvious to those of us who were councillors and parents that those who did most of the speaking were teachers. It was only the teachers who understood modern developments and were familiar with what was going on within the school from day to day.

That is why I suspect that it will cost substantially more than the Government care to admit to enable parents to be properly trained and to spend the amount of time necessary to tackle the head teacher and the teachers on an equal basis. I am all for an interchange of views between teachers and parents, but it must be on the basis of equality. I would certainly back any measure that enabled parents to be properly financed so that they could argue with and tackle head teachers.

When I was a councillor, I often felt that what I was being told by the head teacher was not quite right, but because I did not have the grounding in the curriculum that they had I was not able to compete with them and speak the same language. That is a serious point. If Conservative Members had the slightest experience of school councils, they would realise that it is a very serious problem. Of course the serious problem for Scottish education is that Conservative Members do not have such experience.

Indeed, one of the fundamental problems facing Scottish education is that the Government are blockading funds to schools and at the same time are waging guerrilla warfare against the schools in the public sector because it does not affect them and it does not affect their children if they experiment with other people's children. That is why this measure is so deeply resented.

Clauses 9 and 10 place significant impositions on the education authority and on the head teacher to provide information to those members of the school board who ask for it. It is quite right that they should have such information. One of the weaknesses of school councils is that they did not get information that they might have wanted. One of the reasons why they did not get it was the tremendous cost of providing that information and the cost that would have been incurred by members of the school council in getting that information. If the Minister

[Mr. Darling]

is serious about the school boards being successful, he must be prepared properly to fund the activities of the board.

All the school councils that I was on wanted to communicate with the parents and the community in the areas that they served. They could not do so because they did not have the funds to put together a newsletter. It is as serious and as simple as that. They did not have the funds because the local education authority was not in a position to make those funds available. That is another reason why the Government's estimate of the cost of running the school boards is wildly wrong. They know nothing about school councils because they have no practical experience. Indeed, their total experience of Scottish education is gained from lunatic fringes in obscure academic institutes that seem to steer our education system.

Opposition Members intend to pursue the debate tonight because every penny that is spent on school boards will come out of the budgets of education authorities. The concern of school councils and of parents throughout Scotland, England and Wales is the lack of money to be spent on buying school books, laboratory equipment and games equipment, and on painting and maintaining the schools. The one thing about which parents are concerned is lack of funds.

That is why we feel very resentful that the school boards proposal will take funds away from the rest of the education budget, at a time when the Government could quite easily put the matter right. If they are serious about parental involvement, first, they should fund the boards properly, and, secondly, they should start funding schools and education properly.

10.58 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): It is important that we look at the financial implications of the Bill. The Government have mentioned £5 million as a basis. I contend that that is a throw-away figure, as the Government are not interested in state education and public provision and the figure of £5 million bears little relation to the cost.

If the Bill were to provide a genuine basis for parental involvement, it would be welcomed by parents, educationists and the public. However, we have to look to the Government and to the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), in order to determine our faith in their intentions. On 11 November 1985, in the debate on the Gracious Speech, he said to the then Secretary of State for Education and Science:

> "In the industrial areas of our land, the strategy of privatisation has broken the mould . . . I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science will embrace the same strategy in his attitude to education." —[*Official Report*, 11 November 1985; Vol. 86, c. 366.]

That is what he and every individual in Scotland see as the Government's intention in proposing the Bill.

The consultation exercise confirmed that fact. Only 1 per cent. of the 7,600 returns supported the Government's proposals; 95 per cent. of the individuals who replied refuted them; and 95 per cent. of the parent-teacher associations refuted the Government's proposals.

What will the Bill do for individual parents and for Scottish education? It will do nothing for individual parents who seek information about their children. The Bill does not provide for the rights of individual parents and it does not provide resources for Scottish education. It will take much-needed money away from Scottish education.

What will the Bill do for my constituents? There is a secondary school in my constituency that has to close and amalgamate with another school. I warn the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), that I shall demand that he provides as good public education in Dumbarton in the future as has been provided in the past.

Opting out will denude local authorities of finance. The Bill already provides for opting out. Clause 5, in conjunction with clause 8, will make opting out a reality. According to clause 5, school boards can operate in an autonomous fashion to the extent that they can seek further functions until they opt out of local authority control completely. Subsection (2) confers on head teachers a status that is independent of that of employee and representative of the local education authority. Subsection (3) provides that a local education authority can give advice to a school board only if the school board requests it. Subsection (2) of clause 8 provides that in exercising its functions a school board shall act as the agent of the local education authority in its dealings with third parties. The combined effect of these clauses will have grave implications for local authorities.

The clause also specifies that school board members have no personal liability so long as they act in good faith. Thus, a school board will be able to negotiate with third parties and in doing so commit grievous errors, yet the local authority will be unable to do anything about it other than take the consequences for the wrongful act of a school board. If local authority councillors have to take responsibility for their actions, then school board members should also have to take such responsibility.

The lack of definition suggests to me that the Government do not give a toss for education. They are on their way to opting out and to privatisation. The Government are telling the Scottish electorate that the good state education system that has been built up in Scotland over many years no longer features in their plans. That is demonstrated by the status that the Government have given to members of school boards.

Further, clause 8(4) provides that school boards shall have regard to further education, but it does not specify that it has to be provided. In theory, a school board could decide to provide further education, but a simple majority of parents on the school board would have the right to decide whether adults could enjoy further education in a particular school. It will be for the school boards to decide whether further education is to be provided for the local community. It is a recipe for disaster in education.

I am very much aware of the time. Let me say, however, that the results of consultation show that the Government have been deaf to the responses that they have received. Their blindness in going ahead with their plans can only mean the destruction of education in Scotland. That is why, for the sake of resources and of Scottish education, we must fight the Bill line by line and clause by clause.

11.4 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): The hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) has just made the most

astonishing attack on the judgment of his own Front Bench. It was that Front Bench, and the spokesman responsible for education, who welcomed the proposals in January as a major climbdown on the Government's part, and as representing a consensus that people in Scotland would be prepared to support.

The hon. Gentleman raised again the same point—about 95 per cent. of responses to consultation being opposed—that was made by several speakers in the Second Reading debate. I answered then, but in case he did not hear what I said, I shall repeat it. The EIS rated every response that made any criticism of our proposals as opposition, and the consultation process—which resulted in some 8,000 responses—produced a remarkable number of positive suggestions, many of which have been incorporated in the Bill.

However, we are discussing the money resolution. The resolution provides for two sets of costs which may arise from the Bill. Both are very modest. First, it provides for expenses accruing to the Secretary of State, to cover expenditure incurred in the development of any information and training programme for board members. That is clearly of crucial importance. We estimate that such a programme will cost about £500,000 in 1988-89, and we intend the amount to be met from existing planned provision.

Secondly, the resolution provides for other costs attributable to the Bill. That will allow the Government to meet their pledge to look at any case that local authorities may make for net additional costs arising from the introduction of school boards to be included in the annual rate support grant settlement.

Mr. Buchan: Will the Minister answer the questions?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman asks me to answer the questions. He spent a great deal of the House's time asking what would be the cost implications of opting out. There are no proposals in the Bill for opting out, so no question arises about the costs of providing for it in either the resolution or the Bill. Indeed, I have just answered that point implicitly by pointing out the two purposes to which the resolution relates. *[Interruption.]* I shall come to the points made by hon. Members one by one, in my own time.

A curious line of thought seems to run through the questions raised by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) and some other hon. Members who have contributed to this short debate. They seem to suggest that there is something deficient in Scottish parents. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Oh, yes. They seem to take the view that every other country in Europe, and other parts of the United Kingdom, can have highly developed systems of parental involvement in schools, but that Scotland cannot—that Scottish parents will somehow behave differently, and are not able to take on the responsibilities that exist elsewhere.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): The Minister travelled to Denmark at public expense to shore up the assertion that certain things happen in Europe, only to be contradicted entirely by teachers' representatives in that country. Should he not be a little more cautious about citing European examples in support of his statements?

Mr. Forsyth: I should give a little advice to the hon. Gentleman. It is always wise to check one's facts before making a point. I appreciate that it was difficult to see, but tucked in the bottom part of the letters page of *The Scotsman* he would have seen a letter from the Danish Minister of Education, who is a Liberal, pointing out that the person who was dragged across to this country by the EIS to make the point that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) made was totally unrepresentative.

The suggestion of the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North was also an attack on the BBC, which sent a film crew to Denmark with us. It spoke to all the teachers' representatives, the Minister of Education, the trade unions and parents and could not find one person who did not take the view that the effect of having parents involved in schools had been to increase the quality of provision of education. That is also the answer to the point made by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), who asked how the proposals will result in an improvement in the quality of education.

Our estimate of the true net additional cost—net additional cost is the key point—of the introduction of school boards is in the region of £5 million at the outset. That is less than 0·5 per cent. of the total local authority current expenditure on schools in 1986-87. Even the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities' inflated estimate amounts to only just over 1 per cent. of that expenditure. Nevertheless—I should have thought that Opposition Members would welcome this—we have shown our willingness to look at any case that the authorities may make for an increase in the rate support grant settlement, and this resolution provides the mechanism for us to meet that promise.

The resolution provides for the essential expenditure associated with preparing and training school board members and allows us to meet our promise to consider the effect of the Bill on education authorities. It should have the support of both sides of the House.

The reasons why the COSLA estimate differed from our net figure were explained during my response to the Second Reading debate.

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

It being three-quarters of an hour after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted Business):—*

The House divided: Ayes 201, Noes 72.

Division No. 251] **[11.12 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard	Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Alison, Rt Hon Michael	Boscawen, Hon Robert
Allason, Rupert	Boswell, Tim
Amess, David	Bottomley, Peter
Amos, Alan	Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Arbuthnot, James	Bowis, John
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*	Brazier, Julian
Ashby, David	Bright, Graham
Aspinwall, Jack	Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Atkins, Robert	Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Atkinson, David	Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Baldry, Tony	Buck, Sir Antony
Batiste, Spencer	Budgen, Nicholas
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony	Burns, Simon
Bellingham, Henry	Burt, Alistair
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*	Butcher, John
Bevan, David Gilroy	Butler, Chris
Blackburn, Dr John G.	Butterfill, John

Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Franks, Cecil
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
Knapman, Roger
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maude, Hon Francis
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ryder, Richard
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd and
Mr. David Maclean.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Graham, Thomas
Haynes, Frank
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mowlam, Marjorie
Nellist, Dave
O'Neill, Martin
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Short, Clare
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Spearing, Nigel
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wilson, Brian
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alastair Darling and
Mr. John McFall.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved.

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the School Boards (Scotland) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenses of the Secretary of State under the Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable under any other enactment.

Church Commissioners (Priority Areas)

11.22 pm

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, Representing Church Commissioners): I beg to move,

That the Church Commissioners (Assistance for Priority Areas) Measure, passed by the General Synod of the Church of England, be presented to Her Majesty for her Royal Assent in the form in which the said Measure was laid before Parliament.

The general aim of this Measure is twofold. First, it updates some existing powers of the Church Commissioners so that they may assist the dioceses with finance for church buildings in any area where social or economic changes have taken place. "Church buildings" here means buildings of any description provided or adapted for church purposes, and could include, for example, facilities for youth clubs or even sheltered workshops or a day nursery or some other such provision. Secondly, it gives the Commissioners separate, discretionary powers to make payment to the Church urban fund, which has been established by the Church of England to target financial assistance to urban priority areas.

As regards the church building provisions, the Commissioners currently have the power under the New Housing Areas (Church Buildings) Measure 1954 to make payment out of their general fund towards suitable buildings for use by or in connection with the Church in areas of substantial housing development.

That Measure reflected the special need for such buildings in the aftermath of the second world war, when local sources of finance were unable to keep pace with the demand for such buildings created by the huge mushroom growth in new building. This power was exercisable in areas of recent housing development, which the 1954 measure defined as the provision of new dwellings after 1 April 1945. That is well over 40 years ago now. Wartime developments also qualified if the Commissioners were satisfied that the lack of suitable Church buildings was due to wartime conditions.

The 1954 definition of recent housing developments has been blunted by the passage of time, since it now includes developments which took place, as I have said, over 40 years ago. So clause 1(1) of the new Measure substitutes a new definition which limits eligible developments to those completed during the period of 25 years preceding a request to the Commissioners for assistance under the 1954 Measure, thereby telescoping the eligible time frame.

Clause 1(2) is a transitional provision to ensure that requests for assistance received by the Commissioners before clause 1 of the Measure before us tonight comes into force will be dealt with by them in accordance with the definition as originally enacted.

The Commissioners have become increasingly aware that the concentration of the 1954 Measure on new housing areas touched only a part of the problems facing us today. Social and economic changes on their own can create a new need for suitable Church buildings of the kind I have already described. This point was well made in the report of the Archibishop's commission on urban priority areas.

Accordingly, clause 2(1) gives power to the Commissioners to make grants or loans for or towards the provision of Church buildings in any area where there are not enough suitable Church buildings because of social or economic changes in that area. And these, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will be glad to hear, need not be limited to urban priority areas. The rural community—my right hon. and hon. Friends and right hon. and hon. Gentlemen will be glad to know that the rural environment has not been lost sight of in this Measure—will also be eligible.

Clause 2(2) supplements this by incorporating certain provisions of the 1954 Measure, the most notable of which is section 1(5), which defines the provision of Church buildings as including their acquisition, or the acquisition of sites for them, their erection, enlargement or improvement, and the conversion or adaptation of any buildings for use as Church buildings.

The 1954 Measure was directed to the provision of buildings wholly or mainly used for purposes connected with the Church of England. By section 2(1) of the Sharing of Church Buildings Measure 1970, the powers under the 1954 Measure were extended to Church buildings affected by a sharing agreement and owned by the Church of England only, or jointly with another Church. Clause 2(3) extends, as it were, the ecumenical powers in subsection (1) in a similar way.

Clause 3 authorises the Commissioners to make payments to the Church urban fund. Subsection (2) describes in more detail the ways in which money may now be made available, and corresponds to the power that the Commissioners have under section 1(4) of the 1954 Measure.

The establishment of the Church urban fund was recommended in the report of the Archbishop's commission on urban priority areas—which was the commission that authorised, and indeed set up and produced, the familiar book "Faith in the City"—as a means for creating a financial mechanism to target financial assistance from the Church on urban priority areas. It was recognised that most of the fund's resources would have to be obtained through a national appeal. Indeed, the Church is shortly to embark upon an appeal to raise no less than £18 million for the Church urban fund. However, the report also recommended that the fund's resources should include an annual contribution from the Church Commissioners.

The House will know that the Church Commissioners' power to spend money is regulated by the Church Commissioners Measure 1947 which established the Church Commissioners and which specified what they could spend money on, principally the care of souls. If they step outside the prescribed limits or areas of expenditure they have to come to the House for authority to do so, which is the purpose of the Measure before us.

The Church urban fund has already been incorporated as a company, registered under the Companies Act 1985 and limited by guarantee. The Archbishop of Canterbury is the chairman of the directors, who are referred to as trustees. The vice-chairman is Sir Richard O'Brien, who is chairman of the Archbishop's commission. There are nine other trustees, of whom three are nominated by the Church Commissioners.

The prime task of the fund is to contribute to urban renewal by helping local people to plan and implement ways of meeting their own spiritual, social and economic needs. The Church is well placed, because it already has a considerable presence in urban priority areas. The fund will work ecumenically and promote partnership with other voluntary organisations, local authorities and statutory bodies. It aims to generate spending of £4 million

[Mr. Michael Alison]

a year until at least the year 2010. The Commissioners hope to contribute £1 million a year to the fund. They are confident that this will not prejudice their existing commitments or their basic object, which is the financial support of the clergy.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Can my right hon. Friend explain whether "Faith in the City" means that the Church will be selling its agricultural holdings in order to invest in the new urban fund?

Mr. Alison: The resources for the £1 million which the Commissioners hope to contribute to the Church urban fund will come out of the Church Commissioners' general fund, which is a pool of income derived from their investments. They will not be selling any investment to effect the £1 million contribution which they are hoping to make.

There are one or two technical provisions which I should mention. Clause 4 is largely technical. Subsection (1) deals with citation; subsection (2) contains definitions; subsection (3) provides for the Measure to come into force on a day or days to be appointed by the archbishops jointly. Now that the Church urban fund has been incorporated, there is no reason why the Measure should not be brought into force at the earliest possible date—subject, of course, to the House approving it.

Both strands of the Measure are a natural development of the Commissioners' historic role to help the clergy, especially in poor parishes. The Measure gives an opportunity to take further practical action for the Church in areas of economic stress, whether in town or country. The Commissioners are happy to be able to help in this way and are confident, although not complacent, about their ability to find money for it from the general fund.

I hope, therefore, that the House will approve the Measure.

11.33 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The Measure is most welcome. As the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) knows, the Church has been waiting for us in this place to have the opportunity to debate it, having itself resolved, with no opposition from bishops, clergy or laity, that the Measure was a way of responding to one of the calls in "Faith in the City". Sometimes the Church is criticised for interfering in matters of the state. This is archetypally not a Measure which seeks to do that. It is archetypally a Measure whereby the Church is seeking to put its own house in order, to redirect its own resources and to re-order its own affairs. The approval of the House is needed so that the Commissioners can make their contribution on behalf, as it were, of the whole established Church and, out of its accumulated funds, to the Church urban fund, which will be launched on 20 April, as the right hon. Member for Selby said.

The launch date is near and the two archbishops have asked that in all churches on the following weekend there will be an appeal for all dioceses to contribute to the fund. The large contributions to the fund will come from within the Church—led, supported and directed by the bishops, or their nominees in the diocese of the Church of England—and the grant funding of projects to assist the Church's mission in urban areas will then be made as a result of applications being submitted and carefully processed with the approval of the bishops.

This will not be an independent body working within the Church. It will be an essential method by which the Church will fund its mission in the urban areas in ways which those concerned consider to be appropriate. The procedures for doing this have been carefully prepared to ensure that applications for grant most appropriately help the work of the Church.

This is an important Measure to the Church, and in saying that I should perhaps declare my interest as the only hon. Member on the committee appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury to continue to advise him on the implementation of the document "Faith in the City", as it applies to both the Church and the nation.

The key conclusion, in fundamental terms, in that report as it addressed itself to the Church was that the Church had been failing in particular to address the concerns and needs, both social and spiritual, of many urban areas. Many such areas have seen a change of pattern. People have moved out of the old city centres and have created new communities for themselves in peripheral estates. But the Church leadership has remained; the parish priests are still there, often some of the few professionals living in the places where they work.

They have often been left with the feeling of having old plant—old churches, old equipment and old resources—and without the wherewithal, because they have small, often poor, congregations, who may be unable to rise to the challenge of meeting the demands and costs of the Church in the 1980s and beyond. If the Church, in an ecumenical way, as the Measure would provide, is to become renewed, it must in many instances have renewed plant, resources, strategy and enthusiasm.

Another method which "Faith in the City" identified as appropriate to help the Church was for the historic resources of the Church to be diverted away from areas where they had accumulated but had little applied use, apart from creating income on capital. The report did not see that historic wealth being at present applied in ways which allowed the Church to go about its work, remembering that the work of mission and support is expensive and must be funded.

Many eminent members of the Church, lay and ordained, have been involved in the preparation of this Measure, and it is noteworthy that Sir Richard O'Brien is the vice-chairman of the fund. Having previously been chairman of the Commission, he has been committed, as a financier and leader of commerce and investment policy, to making sure that the Church does its job in a professional and competent way. His advice and that of many others has been sought, as a result of which this Measure has come into being.

There was no opposition in the Synod. There was agreement in the Committee of both Houses that met to consider whether it was expedient for this matter to come before the House. By an overwhelming majority, it decided that now was the time and there could be no delay.

I hope that the Measure will go through, and that there will be no opposition to it. I hope that we shall not be distracted by peripheral issues. The Church wants to be effective in the urban areas of Britain, and to set its own house in order. Like many other hon. Members, I represent a constituency in inner urban Britain, with its dereliction and decay—both secular, and, apparently,

religious. The sooner those who are working for the renewal of urban Britain are aided by having the resources to go about their work, the more likely will be physical and structural renewal, and the renewal of communities, their morality and the social fabric of inner Britain.

The sooner also will be the renewal of the sort of hope that has long since gone for many who live in our urban areas and which, were it not for the Church, would have been extinguished altogether. The flames of that hope had become embers in many places. Now is the chance for the House, given that the Church has decided it can move ahead, to fan those embers back into flame and renew the practical application of what the Christian message is meant to be in the urban areas of Britain in the 1980s, and beyond.

11.42 pm

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): I wish to say a few words in strong support of the Measure. It provides a welcome opportunity to look again at "Faith in the City", a document which was open to easy misinterpretation, partly because it touched on political matters, and so fell easy prey to the tabloid press, which sought only the sensational parts of it.

The document was important because it was a sensitive understanding by the Church of its own problems in the inner cities. It confronted them honestly and straightforwardly, and looked hard at its own flaws. It is a shame that that aspect of the report was never really brought out in subsequent discussions of it. I disagree strongly with some of its political conclusions and solutions, but it is to be strongly commended for its self-criticism of the work the Church was doing in the inner cities.

There are some shining examples of Church growth in our poor areas, mostly depending on inspired leadership and strong biblical teaching. There are also examples of failure by the Church in the inner cities. If the Measure can help to build up successes and prevent failures, it is to be warmly welcomed. The removal of Jesus Christ from the heart of our cities is as dire as his removal from our own lives. If the Measure can help to deal with that, too, it is to be welcomed.

The Church must ensure that its work, whether in cities, towns or inner cities always puts God first. It must remember that its real renewal, as the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said, is based around its biblical teaching, not its social policies and skills. It is true that the one is a tool for the other, but the Church must always remember that God's work comes first, because that is the engine of growth and renewal in the Church.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey will remember that when he and I were in South Africa two years ago with the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), we went to a church service in Alexandra, one of the townships outside Johannesburg. In terms of material deprivation and poverty, that place outstripped anything that our inner cities can produce. Yet the church was filled to capacity on the morning we went to it. No political sermon was preached; there was simply an immense feeling of the love of Jesus Christ and of God. It filled the people in that church, and the amount of good work engendered by that spirit was immense. There was no question there of using resources for one particular purpose and putting politics before God. God was at the heart of it, and everything flowed from that.

I quote that example to remind the Church in this country of exactly the same thing. If God is in the right place, and if the spiritual leadership and the biblical teaching of the Church are right, the resources can help to build up the atmosphere and the work of the Church, and that will have extra influence on the inner cities around the Church. If we get that the wrong way round and concentrate too much on the social and political side and move people too far away from God, they will not make the right connections and the right decisions.

The Measure will be sensibly used by the Church in the inner cities to do exactly what is needed. It has long been necessary and I am glad to see it. I am certain that the Measure will be used in the right way by the Church and the House should warmly welcome it.

11.45 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Clement Attlee gave Members of the House the advice that in debate, whenever possible, they should say yes or no, or admit that they had nothing new to contribute. Having listened to the contribution by the Second Church Estates Commissioner, I am happy to say that I have nothing new to contribute to the debate, except to say that I hope we approve the Measure. After all, it may be the last non-contentious issue for some time that we receive from the Church.

11.46 pm

Dr. John G. Blackburn (Dudley, West): I have been honoured by the House by being given the opportunity to serve for the past nine years on the Ecclesiastical Committee of the House and I have always taken a great interest in the spiritual welfare of the Church and in the message that it presents to the country at large.

Like hon. Members in all parts of the House, at times I was challenged and confused by the document that is at the centre of our debate—"Faith in the City". Having examined it at great length, I think that the House must applaud the fact that for the first time in many years the Church has stopped, has publicly examined itself and has produced the method by which we should go forward well into the next century. My right hon. Friend outlined that when he opened the debate.

It is true beyond words that today Britain needs a spiritual awakening, and that must not be marred or tarnished in any way by the social and other aspects of the Measure. The Measure is expedient and in the quietness of the House tonight we are taking a most historic step that will have a tremendous impact on the spiritual values of the country. It is my prayer that it will bring new life and a new vision of Jesus Christ. I wish the Measure godspeed.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Church Commissioners (Assistance for Priority Areas) Measure, passed by the General Synod of the Church of England, be presented to Her Majesty for her Royal Assent in the form in which the said Measure was laid before Parliament.

Green Belt (Bearsden and Milngavie)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

11.48 pm

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I wish to speak about the green belt in Bearsden and Milngavie district council area and I propose to leave some time for my esteemed colleague the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) to take part in the debate. We shall speak with a massive amount of public support and with Bearsden and Milngavie district council behind us.

Only this afternoon the community council in Milngavie phoned to say that it was fully behind us on this issue. All political parties in Bearsden and Milngavie agree on the importance of defending the green belt and are worried by a recent decision of the Secretary of State which undermines the Strathclyde region structure plan. That plan has been immensely important in regenerating Glasgow and in ensuring that that city avoids becoming what the Americans call a doughnut city—one that expands to the outside and leaves a great hole in the middle.

Through that structure plan, there has been a considerable move that has stopped the green belt being encroached upon and the outside of Glasgow becoming wall-to-wall Wimpey. Before Strathclyde came into being, there was a massive overprovision of building land on green field sites. The reason for the debate is to protest at the weakening of the structure plan as a result of the Secretary of State's approval of the building of 6,600 more houses in green field areas. That is not yet affecting Bearsden and Milngavie, but, if we follow through the argument, it will eventually do so.

Bearsden and Milngavie are highly desirable places to live and they both retain their precious, separate identities. People like living there. There are strong community ties, but those depend very much on the size being kept to a reasonable level. The demand to live there is simply immense. Builders would wish to build there continuously, if they were not prevented from doing so, but the demand should be resisted because of the need to continue the regeneration of Glasgow, which has been an immense success, with tenements restored and new housebuilding in areas such as Maryhill, Priesthill and, above all, the Gear area.

One would also need to resist the builders' demands, if the Government's urban policy, announced two or three weeks ago, were to have any chance of success. The Government say that they are now interested in the peripheral housing schemes. One assumes that what occurred in Priesthill will occur in some of those schemes—selective demolition of some areas where there are vacant houses and new private building.

Builders will not go on to brown field sites in inner-city areas unless they are forced to do so. At the inception of the structure plan, the builders said that there would be no demand for city centre sites, but they were proved wrong. They simply wanted to go on building in the traditional areas—Bearsden, Milngavie, Strathkelvin, Lenzie and so on.

It is also important that the builders are resisted because of the infrastructure implications. It is common sense that, where the infrastructure in terms of roads, water, sewers and schools, has already been put in, one should not unnecessarily duplicate that work. As the Under-Secretary of State knows, the Secretary of State for Scotland is singularly mean with Strathclyde regional council. There is no service for which Strathclyde council has been proportionately funded for the past five years. There has been systematic and planned underfunding of that local authority.

In addition to considering the infrastructure factors and the need to regenerate Glasgow, we must also bear in mind that the communities of Bearsden and Milngavie want very much to maintain themselves as they are. They are densely congested districts. They have the least countryside of any district council in Scotland. There is a need for some development in terms of the demand for sheltered housing and further council housing in the area, which is desperately needed, and housing for first-time buyers, but that is not what the builders want to put up.

All that is threatened by the Secretary of State and his weakening of the structure plan. There has been a denial of the fact, demonstrated by the regional and district councils, that Greater Glasgow is a single housing market. Everybody knows that, although people may talk in terms of north of the Clyde and south of the Clyde. To treat the district council areas as the Secretary of State is urging, as the basic unit for supply and demand is frankly ridiculous. What the Secretary of State has done in allowing for mobile demand in Greater Glasgow and Lanarkshire, at half the level shown by recent outside purchasing moves, has no basis in fact. This is denying the regional role in terms of a structural plan. Oddly enough, the district councils fully support the regional role.

It is not true, as the Secretary of State for Scotland has claimed, that the detailed matching of supply and demand is clearly a matter for district councils. It is not. As far as we can tell there is unlimited demand to live in Bearsden and Milngavie. If the demand is yielded to, it will destroy the integrity of the area.

The Secretary of State has accepted the view of the house builders. He has said:

"councils should define an approach to housing market areas which accords more closely with the perceptions of the house builders. The effective land supply as agreed and tabulated by the house builders during 1987 should be taken as a starting point for district assessments."

Why? What evidence is there that the district is right? The elected representatives, the professional planners in the district and region, do not think that the builders are right, but the Secretary of State has taken the view of the self-interested group without accepting that the self-interested group will automatically claim that there is a need for more housing on green field sites. The Secretary of State admits that he is not going by the demographic facts alone and claims that other vague factors must be taken into account. However, there has been no public examination of the builders' submissions.

Left to themselves, the builders automatically prefer green field sites unless they are forced to build on brown field sites. We can reach only one conclusion and I regret saying this. In effect, the Secretary of State and the Tory party have been bought by the builders' interests. Last year the builders made donations of about £150,000 to the Tory party and they are now receiving the reward for their investment.

We have had an immensely successful structure plan for which all parties, including the Government and the local

authorities, deserve credit. All the evidence is that the structure plan is working. However, it is being undermined by the Secretary of State's decision, and the revival of Glasgow and the urban policy announced two or three weeks ago are under threat. If we followed the requirements of the Secretary of State in his yielding to the builders, there would be wasteful provision of infrastructure.

As the local Member representing the Milngavie part of Bearsden and Milngavie district, I can tell the Secretary of State that he will undermine the special community nature of places like Milngavie if those areas are prevented from becoming stable and settled communities. If the Secretary of State pushes out along that line, one of the great success stories for which all parties can take credit—one of the great success stories of post-war planning—the green belt, will be threatened.

By choosing this subject for the Adjournment debate, I hope that the Minister will justify the extraordinary example of special pleading which the builders have made without any authentication or public examination of their submission. Why has the Secretary of State given in to the profit desires of the builders and ignored all the informed opinion and the public sentiment of the citizens of Bearsden and Milngavie?

11.58 pm

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on behalf of my constituents in the Bearsden part of the Bearsden and Milngavie district council and to protect their interests in what is a desirable, beautiful and excellent place to live. My constituents wish it to stay that way, and I see no reason why it should not do so.

We now find the Government forcing changes on the district which will significantly alter its characteristics and my constituents oppose that. They do not understand, as my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) said, why the districts are suddenly to be the measure by which ranges of options of land are to become available. What has happened to the Greater Glasgow market?

I have many friends who were born in Bearsden or Milngavie who moved off for a while to the centre of Glasgow and lived in the west end, Hyndland and Clarence driveway, before returning eventually to Bearsden or Milngavie. That is the nature of the Glasgow housing market.

I hope that the Minister will address himself to the specific points that I am about to raise. In the Secretary of State's decision letter, Res. 1 says:

"Each district will bring forward and maintain a range of opportunities for private house building."

That is important, because it means that in Bearsden and Milngavie parts of the green belt will have to be opened up. There is enough land available for future housing needs in Bearsden and Milngavie, but for the range of options being considered the green belt will have to be opened up, particularly if, as the builders tell us, the plans are not just for flats or houses with one or two bedrooms but for houses at the upper end of the market at £150,000. Is Res. 1 in the Secretary of State's letter to satisfy the need for the upper end of the market? The builders will use it to open up the green belt. As my hon. Friend says, they will not go to brown field sites.

Let us consider Res. 3 and the increased demand that is written into it. There is some confusion with Res. 1. Paragraph 1.5.6 of the decision letter recognises that immediate cross-boundary flows and opportunities may occasionally justify some flexibility in matching local demand and supply for individual districts. What does that mean? Have the districts to be self-contained, or shall we take into consideration what is going on in surrounding districts? If so, we are back to a Greater Glasgow housing market.

Let me remind the Minister of the Tower farm decision. The Secretary of State recognised that demand for the kind of housing sought in the application. Tower farm is in the Strathkelvin area of my constituency which, according to Resolution 3 will have to find additional land for houses, which will, of necessity, mean opening up the green belt. Tower farm would have been the initial opening up. Yet the Secretary of State said that demand for the kind of housing sought in the application could be met through the development of available sites in Bearsden and Milngavie, which are nearby within the conurbation as well as in the same market area.

Is not there a confusion in the Secretary of State's decision letter where he talks about single districts and the greater market? How much flexibility will there be? Will Strathkelvin have to meet all its extra demand by opening up the green belt or can it be met in surrounding districts with surpluses of land? Can Bearsden and Milngavie deal with Resolution 1 by looking at the Strathkelvin area? That is important. It is also relevant to the current issue of the Langfauld farm application, which is going to written submissions. Does the Secretary of State agree that that must go to a public inquiry?

Is it not the case that the Scottish Office is now paying its debts to the builders? As we know, the chairman of the Conservative party has close links with McTaggart and Mickel. Are the Government now paying them back in kind for their contributions to the Conservative party?

12.4 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): Our premise is to act in the best interests of Scotland as a whole. May I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) who is responsible for at least 50 per cent. of the Adjournment debates which I have answered, as well as an enormous host of parliamentary questions. I say that in advance, as I am about to disagree with much of what he said. I shall endeavour to answer all the points that he raised and I shall read again what the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) said and if I miss any points I shall follow them up in writing.

I am aware that the modifications have given rise to concern and I should like to make two preliminary points. First, I should make it clear that I cannot offer a definitive interpretation of the policies which now form part of the approved structure plan. The reasoning behind the various modifications which my right hon. Friend made to the policies submitted to him is set out in my Department's decision letter of 10 March. Therefore, a decision has been made and any dispute over the interpretation, if pursued, would have to be a matter for the courts to decide.

However, I believe that the policies are clear. They will have to be interpreted by the district council in preparing its revised local plan for the district and in considering the

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

planning application which it receives. What I can do is give the general considerations which gave rise to that decision letter.

Secondly, I should make it clear that any alteration of green belt boundaries is primarily a matter for the district council. Green belt boundaries are not fixed by the Secretary of State. The need for a green belt in a particular area and the general shape that green belt should take are matters for the regional council, in areas like Strathclyde where both the region and the district having planning responsibilities. As part of its strategic planning for the region as a whole the regional council may wish to propose alterations to the general shape of the green belt, to provide additional protection or to accommodate new development, but the actual boundaries of the green belt can only be formally determined by district councils in local plans.

Thus, the boundaries of that part of the Clyde valley green belt which falls in Bearsden and Milngavie district have been set in the local plans adopted by the district council and will be revised or confirmed in the districtwide local plan which the council has in preparation. Only in exceptional circumstances would my right hon. Friend be prepared to intervene in the preparation of the local plan. I am aware of only one case in which that has happened in the past.

I now turn to the Strathclyde structure plan update 1988, which my right hon. Friend approved with modifications last week.

Mr. Galbraith: Will the Minister give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I should like to get on with the debate; I have many points to answer in a short time.

When our proposed modifications to this update were published last October, many of those who commented argued that they would have the effect of encouraging housing development in the green belt on a significant scale and would detract from the efforts which have been made to encourage regeneration in the Glasgow conurbation. That was the point that the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden just made. Particular concern was expressed by Bearsden and Milngavie district council about the erosion of the green belt in its district. I believe these representations were based on a misunderstanding of the modifications, for a number of reasons.

In the first place, the update contains, as well as a review of the supply of housing land, a review of the Clyde valley green belt. The purpose of this review, which stems from my Department's circular on green belts issued in 1985, was to establish a longer-term settlement strategy for the definition of the green belt, to ensure that the green belt had stability and endurance and to give consideration to the reinstatement of land of which was not making a significant contribution to the green belt.

The review concluded that the general shape of the present green belt was consistent and defensible and that no major alterations to its boundaries were needed. This conclusion was endorsed by my right hon. Friend in approving the update. While this endorsement does not preclude local boundary adjustments, it underlines the commitment of the region and the Government to the maintenance of a green belt around Glasgow and to the retention of the general shape of the existing green belt.

Secondly, while the modifications identify certain districts where in our view action needs to be taken soon to increase the effective supply of housing land during the period to 1993, Bearsden and Milngavie district is not one of the districts concerned. That is one of the key points which I seek to emphasise.

As the district council pointed out in its representations, it has a fair amount of land allocated for housing which has not yet been developed. This does not necessarily mean that no further land is needed for housing in the district in the years ahead—this is something which the district will have to discuss with the house builders in preparing its revised local plan—but it does mean that in a regional context Bearsden and Milngavie is not one of the districts where we perceive a particular shortage and I hope that both hon. Members will accept that assurance.

Mr. Worthington: I accept what the Minister says about the present position, but we are firing warning shots. There is a seven-year supply of building land and an unlimited demand by builders for permission to build. The Minister says that the matching of supply and demand has to be within a district council area. The implication is that the green belt will be threatened if the builders' estimate of demand has to be taken as the truth instead of considering the regional context and giving a proper role to both the district councils and the regional councils.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will allow me to answer as many of his questions as possible. We have not gone all the way towards meeting the builders' arguments. We have consulted fully both the councils and the builders and have made the best assessment we can of demand and supply in the years to come. I accept that this is not an exact science; we have to use our best judgment, and we believe that we have done so.

My third point—it is not strictly relevant to the Bearsden and Milngavie district, because no target for additional housing land has been set for that district—is that in districts such as Strathkelvin, where action is needed to find additional housing sites, it does not follow that these sites need to be new green field sites. Many districts have sites allocated for housing which the house builders do not at present believe are likely to yield houses in the near future. In some cases, the sites are not being released by their owners, or there are difficulties over site servicing, ground conditions or other problems.

We believe that a joint examination of these sites by the district council concerned and the house builders could lead to many of them being accepted as effective. In addition, there remains scope in many areas for development on brown field sites in existing built-up areas. We believe, therefore, that many of the additional sites which are needed will be found without and not involving new green field development.

My fourth point is that the new policies that we have introduced have to be read as a whole and that they have to be read in conjunction with the other policies in the structure plan. That is a point which the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden raised. Bearsden and Milngavie district council drew particular attention to the wording of the policy called Res. 1, which states that each district

council must bring forward and maintain a range of opportunities for house building. Read in isolation, that could be taken to imply endless green field residential development in each district, but it is specifically subject to Res. 2, which restates the long-standing presumption in the structure plan in favour of brown field rather than green field development.

In addition, the structure plan contains strong policies to protect the green belt, which are unaffected by the recent update. The new policies acknowledge that demand in one district may to some extent have to be accommodated in neighbouring districts—another point that the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden raised.

My right hon. and learned Friend and I therefore consider that the modifications made to the update do not present a major threat to the green field belt around Glasgow. Indeed, by encouraging district councils to sit down with the house builders and examine why sites already allocated for housing are not delivering a steady supply of houses, by re-emphasising the priority to be given to brown field sites and by requiring further housing sites to be found within Glasgow itself, the policies will help to take pressure off the green belt and reinforce the central strategy in the structure plan of encouraging the regeneration of the conurbation.

Giving encouragement to house builders, far from being counter-productive as the hon. Members suggest, will indirectly help the homeless, about which the hon. Members and their colleagues speak on many occasions. The major initiatives that we announced last month in Castlemilk and Ferguslie Park are evidence of our commitment to the strategy that I have mentioned.

I have already stated, in a parliamentary answer to the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) on 9 February—it is in column 64 of *Hansard*—that we do not expect the modifications that we have made to the update to have a significant effect on the existing green belt. Any boundary adjustments that are needed are most likely to arise in districts where targets for additional sites have been set. As Bearsden and Milngavie is not one of those districts, the policies in the update are even less likely to lead to significant adjustments to the boundary in that district.

As I have explained, I cannot predict how the policies will be interpreted in detail, or prejudge the conclusions that the district council reach in revising its local plans, but I hope that what I have said will allay some of the concern prompted by our modifications to the structure plan update.

Let me now comment more generally on our policy towards green belt and private house building. The Scottish Development Department's circular 24 of 1985 deals with development in the countryside and green belts. As it says, we attach great importance to the need to preserve the existing designated green belts, and to the need to establish confidence in their permanence. We believe that development in designated green belt should continue to be strictly controlled. Appropriate development control policies should be set out in structure plans.

Green belt policies can, however, remain stable only where a proper balance has been struck between the containment and the growth of urban development. Green belts should therefore be based on a long-term settlement strategy for the structure plan area, which provides adequately for such development as can be foreseen. If the green belt boundary is everywhere close to the boundary of the existing built-up area, it is likely to be under constant pressure because of the absence of room for expansion.

The three main purposes for which green belts have traditionally been established are to maintain the identity of towns by establishing clear boundaries and preventing coalescence, to provide countryside for recreation and other purposes and to maintain the landscape setting of towns. We expect authorities, in reviewing green belts, to consider carefully whether land within is making a significant contribution to those central objectives. Where it is not, there may be a case for releasing it for development to relieve pressure on other parts of green belt, or, alternatively, a case for taking positive steps to restore its value as green belt. In general, therefore, we remain strongly committed to the retention of effective green belts, and where cases are referred to us we will authorise development in green belts only in exceptional circumstances.

Let me return more closely to housing in the structure plan. It has been suggested that the number of additional housing sites that the Secretary of State's modifications to the structure plan update require district councils to find is excessive, and that the Secretary of State has been influenced too much by the views of builders. I do not accept that. The Department's guidance on the provision of housing land, contained in circular 21 of 1983, states that in keeping the provision of housing land under review and assessing the demand for new private housing, planning authorities should work closely with representatives of the private house builders.

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at eighteen minutes past Twelve o'clock.

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House of Commons

Wednesday 13 April 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE TOWN MOOR BILL *[Lords]*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time tomorrow.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Manufacturing Industry

1. **Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the increase in manufacturing profits and in manufacturing investment in the latest three years for which figures are available.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Francis Maude): Figures for profits are available only up to 1986. Gross profits of manufacturing companies, including income from self-employment, at current prices increased by £2·2 billion in 1984, £2·3 billion in 1985 and £3 billion in 1986. Gross investment in the manufacturing sector, including leased assets, increased by £1·6 billion and £1·9 billion in 1984 and 1985, respectively, was unchanged in 1986 and is estimated to have increased by a further £0·8 billion in 1987.

Mr. Henderson: Against the background of those figures, is the Minister not alarmed when, with such a growth in company profits, our manufacturing investment is still 11 per cent. lower than in 1979? Is the Minister not perturbed by the pathetic level of research and development in this country, which is lower than that in France, Germany and Italy and less than a third of the rate of increase in Japan since 1981? Does he accept that that low level of R and D is a major contributory factor to our poor level of investment in manufacturing industry? Will the Minister set up an inquiry to examine those issues and consider the impact on investment?

Mr. Maude: I will certainly not set up an inquiry. The hon. Gentleman seems to think that profitability and investment are somehow inconsistent with each other. Of course, profitability in manufacturing in this country is not yet back to the levels that it reached in the early 1970s. If one wants people to invest in industry, one has to show a return on it. If people can make more money by investing in the building society than in manufacturing industry, they will do that. Profitability is now increasing and has been increasing for some years. However, it still has some way to go before it hits the levels of the early 1970s. *[Interruption.]* I am asked what went wrong. The answer is the Labour Government in the late 1970s.

Mr. Dickens: Is it not a fact that manufacturing industry in the United Kingdom is now setting the pace in the Western world, unlike the time when overmanning in nationalised industries, paid for by the taxpayer, put those industries on a treadmill of failure? We have released those industries, and that is why the jobs that we are creating are real jobs, not overmanning manufactured jobs.

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend puts his points robustly and well. The trend that I have disclosed is one of rising and increasing success for British manufacturing industry. It shows that not only profitability but investment, are increasing. It is encouraging that our investment intentions survey shows a further increase in investment this year of 16 per cent. with a further real terms increase in 1989. That is thoroughly good news.

Mr. Barry Jones: In support of my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), may I ask the Minister to consider the fact that in 1986 import levels in textiles, steel, chemicals and motor cars exceeded £6 billion? Against that information, is the Minister not being complacent, and will he listen carefully to what my hon. Friend has said, because the Government have surrendered much of British manufacturing industry?

Mr. Maude: I hear what the hon. Gentleman has said. Of course, I listen carefully to what anybody says on this important subject. Exports from this country have increased pretty dramatically. Many of the goods to which the hon. Gentleman referred are imported by British industry for use in British industry. About 75 per cent. of imports are for industry, not for consumers.

Inner-city Policy

2. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a further statement on progress in implementing the Government's initiatives for inner-city regeneration.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister of Trade and Industry (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I am pleased to say that excellent progress has been made in implementing the action for cities measures announced on 7 March. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is finalising the boundaries of the Lower Don Valley urban development corporation and hopes to lay an order before the House next month. He is about to appoint consultants to report on the extension of the Merseyside development corporation. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office launched the first of 20 safer cities initiatives in Wolverhampton on 7 April. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Employment is to open the first of six new inner-city small firms service offices in Sheffield on 19 April. I took part this morning in Newcastle in the first presentation to encourage company involvement in urban regeneration which was attended by about 200 local business leaders.

Mr. Adley: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that reply and welcome the progress that has been made. Nevertheless, does he agree that resources for investment in the public and private sectors inevitably are finite? Does he accept that for property developers in particular the pickings to be gained by developing in the over-developed, luscious parklands of the south are far easier than redeveloping in urban areas of the kind to which he has alluded? Will he please get together urgently

with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to see whether we can add to the incentives that he has announced disincentives to develop in over-developed areas?

Mr. Clarke: I am glad to say that the total level of investment in the United Kingdom economy, particularly manufacturing investment, is continuing to rise. I do not accept that the level of investment is necessarily finite. However, I understand my hon. Friend's anxiety about the pattern of development, and I am sure that he will welcome many of the measures that I have just announced, because they make it ever more attractive to invest and develop in parts of the country that previously were in decline. Those areas need new factory and housing development for the kind of growth that we are describing.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Minister accept that for the regions and inner cities, particularly in the north and Scotland, to be successful, they will have to be given a fair share of the corporate headquarters and jobs that go with them? What steps does he propose to take to ensure a greater balance and distribution of those jobs rather than an excessive concentration in the south-east, to which the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) referred and by which the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) is disturbed?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the difficulty is that a large proportion of companies tend to have their headquarters in London and the south. The geographical size of the United Kingdom is not so great that that problem cannot be overcome. In the end, it is for companies to decide where to locate their corporate headquarters. In that regard, Scotland has certain advantages over provincial England, and there are indeed more corporate headquarters in Scotland.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that I do not wish to damage the scheme by praising it? I believe that what is being done in the inner cities is the result of one of the best and most robust measures that we have taken in this Parliament. Will he ensure that aid is provided to level old factories so that new industries can rise and thrive? That would be one of the most interesting and useful things that any Government could do for the midlands.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support and advice. I hope that we can help those involved in the Birmingham heartland scheme to achieve what he described in that large area of derelict land in west Birmingham. Everybody with an interest in Birmingham must want to see that area developed as rapidly as possible. We hope that Sir Reginald Eyre and his colleagues will be able to make rapid progress.

Mr. Gould: What is the point of breakfasting business men at £400 a head when the reality is that in a city such as Newcastle, where the Chancellor was this morning, there will be a loss of £2·8 million in purchasing power as a consequence of the changes in the social security scheme? Is not the combined effect of the Government's changes in the Budget and the social security scheme to take money from the deprived in the inner cities and give it to the affluent, who are largely in the south-east? Does that not mean that the effect of the Government's much touted initiative is to perpetrate a cruel and wicked charade?

Mr. Clarke: I do not mind having my leg pulled about breakfasts, but this morning's presentation to the leading business men of the city was very professional. The hon. Gentleman will find that they were impressed by what they heard. They intend to build on what has been achieved with the new Metro centre in Gateshead and the new Burton Design Works in Newcastle. The economy of the area is reviving and will revive in the inner cities. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will welcome the fact that our changes to the rating system, particularly the non-domestic rate, will ensure a reduction in commercial rates in Newcastle of 32 per cent. in the near future. That policy benefits the north, largely at the expense of the south, in a way that he should welcome.

Information Technology

3. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps his Department is taking to help improve the quality of usage of information technology in British businesses.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John Butcher): My Department encourages British businesses to make efficient and effective use of information technology by a variety of means, including the encouragement of best practice, support for collaborative research and development and technology transfer. It is, of course, for individual firms in their particular circumstances to decide how best to make use of IT and so derive the best possible benefit from investment in the technology.

Mr. Cran: Does my hon. Friend agree that the contribution that the better use of information technology can make to the competitiveness of British industry is much under-estimated in this country? Does he also agree that, because the Government are major users of information technology to the tune of £1·5 billion a year, they can set a good example to British industry? Therefore, will he outline to the House how he is sure that his own Department is taking the correct decisions both at the point of purchase and after the event?

Mr. Butcher: The best way of seeking our own departmental assurance is to take advice, where necessary, from experts and practitioners in the industry. I should like to reassure my hon. Friend that we do our very best to remain enlightened users of IT. The general impact of IT usage is a key-enabling technology which pervades all sectors of the economy. That is why my hon. Friend's question is so relevant. Certainly, to my knowledge, for the first time since the war Britain is now out-performing the Federal Republic of Germany in a crucial application area —the use of computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacturing equipment. We are now, in the first major investment programme since the war, outstripping the Germans to the tune of 8 per cent. market penetration. I believe that that is a very significant event.

Dr. Bray: Will the Minister nevertheless recognise that the failure to produce a follow-on programme for the Alvey programme and the substitution for it of the ESPRIT II programme within Europe has left a void in Government support, specifically for the application of new techniques for the British partners in international collaborations? Does he realise that that is losing the country a great deal of the benefit which, as he rightly said, we are fully capable of achieving from information technology if only we are properly organised, with the support of the Government?

Mr. Butcher: We achieved final agreement for ESPRIT on Monday. The hon. Gentleman is correct when he says that there was no follow-up to the Alvey. He will know that there is a programme of about £84 million over five years, partly funded by the Science and Engineering Research Council and by ourselves, which is following up a number of Alvey initiatives. He will also know that there are a number of other programmes in electronics and information technology. We now have, subject to an additional review, the Gallium Arsenide programme, which has been complicated a little by the difficulties between the two participating companies. So we are following up Alvey in the right way in collaborative and pan-European research.

Urban and Rural Areas

5. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment he has made as to what lessons derived from inner-city initiatives can be applied in other distressed urban and rural areas.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: There are three clear lessons. First, the private sector has to be involved in regeneration measures. Public money should be used to bring in private investment. Secondly, efforts to encourage business, improve the environment and motivate local people are more effective when combined. This is why we have established city action teams and task forces to pull together Government effort in inner cities. Thirdly, action has to reflect local circumstances. We have therefore developed a range of measures—from urban development corporations to compacts between schools and industry —to respond to local needs.

Mr. Bennett: Will my right hon. and learned Friend bear in mind that many of the economic and social problems of the inner cities are found on a smaller scale in many rural towns and rural areas across the United Kingdom? Will he therefore draw to the attention of local authorities in those areas some of the exciting solutions that he is finding in the inner cities?

Mr. Clarke: I know that my hon. Friend's constituency suffers from a high level of unemployment. There are many similarities between the problems in Pembrokeshire and those in the depressed towns in the north and in the inner cities in parts of the midlands and the south. Therefore, I accept my hon. Friend's argument that many of the lessons we have learnt about how to stimulate new investment, new business and new employment could, with advantage, be applied to places such as Pembrokeshire.

Mr. Vaz: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that one of the lessons to be drawn from the Leicester experience is the Government's inability to co-operate with and consult the local authority? That is why the inner city initiative in Leicester has been such a disaster.

Mr. Clarke: I think that the inner city initiative in Leicester has been a considerable success, and that it is getting better, because we appear to be achieving a slightly higher level of co-operation with the local authority. It has something to do with the so-called new realism which is said to have been affecting the Labour party since the last general election. In so far as there has been unnecessary political dispute in Leicester, plainly I must assert and remind the House that it was wholly caused by the immediate hostility of Leicester city council the moment that we announced our initiative and before the Government agents had arrived.

Mr. William Powell: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the inner city areas that he is working so hard and with a degree of success to try to bring round have a great deal to learn from other areas in the country that have also been through depressed times? Will he take on board what has happened in my constituency and ensure that the lessons of Corby are applied in all areas that face high unemployment?

Mr. Clarke: The amount of new investment and the collapse in the level of unemployment in Corby are quite spectacular. They are almost matched by the new investment in Scunthorpe and by the new investment in jobs in Consett, both towns having been affected by changes in the steel industry in the past. I agree with my hon. Friend that the success in Corby shows what can be achieved by towns elsewhere that face a severe economic crisis. We shall apply the lessons of Corby throughout the country.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: What lessons has the Minister learnt from Scottish and Newcastle's approach to inner city initiatives, which was to take jobs out of a profitable brewery in Workington—a brewery that received Government grants over the years—and put them into Newcastle? Does he not understand that that constitutes the rape of Workington? It is a criminal act in a moral sense. That company has no right at all to act as a job thief and take jobs away from a profitable brewery in my constituency. Will he now intervene, whereas previously he refused to do so?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman must take up with the management his grievances about the decisions of Scottish and Newcastle Breweries. In my experience of the inner city policy, Scottish and Newcastle Breweries has been a very responsible company. It has worked closely with the Government at its Moss Side brewery in the middle of Manchester, where it received a large urban development grant and recruited and trained a large number of unemployed people from the deprived area around the brewery. It has been equally responsible in the north-east of England. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that as a Minister I have no responsibility for the dispute in Workington to which he referred.

Mr. Hind: Will my right hon. and learned Friend bear in mind that Skelmersdale has very similar problems to Pembroke? In the last 12 months the level of unemployment in the new town has been reduced by nearly 1,500 and major steps have been taken to build new factories in the town. When the task forces in the inner city areas have done their job, will he bear in mind that they could do a great deal of good in places such as Skelmersdale and Pembroke and in other rural and urban areas that are not included in the inner city initiatives?

Mr. Clarke: I share my hon. Friend's pleasure at the fall in unemployment in Skelmersdale and in the north-west generally. I agree that we have to look at the problems faced by all communities such as his in the north-west. We always envisaged that the task forces would be temporary in the cities, where they were established, and that they would aim to work themselves out of a job so that they

could move to other parts of the country when they had carried out the necessary pump-priming in the inner city districts.

Mr. Caborn: When the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster considers expanding these schemes, will he take into account the role of local authorities? Many people are worried by independent reports about the urban development corporations and the task forces showing that, because of Government dogma, the best results are not being achieved. A major report, funded by the Government and local authorities, showed clearly that in the Sheffield scheme it would have been far better to have a partnership than to impose an urban development corporation. Some now say that the UDC could impede progress. Will the Chancellor and his Department have a word with the Secretary of State for the Environment to make sure that there is no imposition and that instead a genuine partnership is developed that involves the local authorities?

Mr. Clarke: We achieve excellent relationships with local authorities of all political complexions in some parts of the country. I share the underlying assumption of the hon. Gentleman's question that it is desirable for the Government, local authorities and the private sector to work together.

Although there is a difference in the conclusions arrived at for the redevelopment of the Don Valley, I do not believe there is any difference between the aims of the Government, the hon. Gentleman and the local authority. I believe that, in time, it will be realised that the Don Valley urban development corporation is of considerable benefit to Sheffield and south Yorkshire, and that it will prove of considerable advantage in redeveloping the land more quickly than the alternative proposals would have done.

Exchange Rates

6. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received about exchange rate stability from manufacturing industry during the past 12 months.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My Department has received representations from a number of companies and trade organisations on the subject of exchange rates.

Mr. Knox: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that manufacturing industry greatly prefers stable to floating exchange rates and would like Britain to join the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system? Is he pressing that view on his colleagues in the Government?

Mr. Clarke: We all wish to see a certain stability in exchange rates, because that is to the advantage of all international trade. However, given the present state of the international exchange markets, it is not possible to achieve complete stability. I have always found the EMS and the idea of joining it attractive. As my hon. Friend knows, the Government will decide whether to join it when the time is right.

Mr. Hayes: Is the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster aware that not many days ago, just before the Easter recess, we had a meeting here with the representatives of the hosiery and knitwear trade and the unions working in it? The right hon. and learned Gentleman, of course, was not present at the meeting, so I am telling him about it now. During those discussions the representatives mentioned not only the unfairness of competition but the financial instability in the exchange rate. When will the Government do something about the problem? Industry is crying out for stability to help it on its way to success. Will the Minister get off his backside and do something about it?

Mr. Clarke: I am sorry that my duties as a Minister sometimes prevent me from pursuing my interests as a constituency Member and attending meetings with representatives of the hosiery and knitwear trade. I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman was there looking after the interests of my county and of those who work in the industry.

Of course, we all desire reasonable stability in exchange rates. However, hon. Members must consider the state of the world exchange markets. No currency can be guaranteed stable exchange rates. Exchange rates have, in fact, been rather advantageous for the bulk of British industry over the past 18 months or two years, but some movements are inevitable, given the present state of international markets.

Mr. Grylls: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while it is obvious that industry prefers stable exchange rates, another perhaps even more important factor is the control of inflation? When the CBI next complains about the exchange rate going up in Britain, will he perhaps remind it that in Japan the yen has appreciated by 40 per cent., and that that country is still able to beat us in many of our export markets?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. Germany and Japan do not seem to have suffered noticeably from having strong currencies over the past few years. My hon. Friend is also right that, when the level of interests rates is being set, a number of factors must be taken into account. One is the effect of changes on the exchange rate; another is the effect on internal demand, monetary policy and the inflation rate.

Rover plc

7. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last met the chairman of Rover plc; what subjects were discussed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I made a statement on 29 March on the subject of Rover Group privatisation, and I have nothing further to add.

Mr. Strang: Does the Minister accept that most people will judge the Government's sale of Rover by the extent to which British Aerospace increases volume car production and maintains—if not accelerates—the pace of design and engineering projects, including the crucial new Metro? In view of the reports in yesterday's and today's *Financial Times*, will the Minister make it clear that there is no question of the Government's allowing the EEC to reduce the amount of public money going into the new combined company, as that would be bound to have an adverse affect on investment and jobs?

Mr. Clarke: There are European Community rules on such matters, and sensible discussions are now taking place between us and the Commission, which will reach their outcome in due course. The agreement that we have

reached is subject to the Commission's approval, and to that of British Aerospace shareholders. We shall have to await the outcome of the discussions taking place now in Brussels on the first point.

Mr. Budgen: Since, no doubt, the chairman of Rover demanded stable exchange rates, and since the Chancellor of the Exchequer has promised stable exchange rates to manufacturing industry, will my right hon. and learned Friend be good enough to guarantee to the rest of the community eternal youth?

Mr. Clarke: I have no recollection of having promised stable exchange rates to anybody. I rather regret that it is impossible for any Chancellor of the Exchequer to achieve complete stability in exchange rates in present circumstances. We would be more interested in discussing with the Rover Group the terms upon which we negotiated the proposed sale to British Aerospace. I think that they are reasonable, that £800 million is a fair reflection of the debts that would be accumulated by Rover Group at the time of completion of the sale, and that the £150 million that BAe proposes to pay is a fair price for the Government's share.

Mr. Hoyle: When the Minister next meets the chairman of Rover plc, will he ask him when he intends to meet the trade unions? Does he agree that there was no consultation with the trade unions prior to the announcement of the bid by BAe—*[Interruption.]* Never mind the yahoos behind the Minister. The trade unions do matter to the people who work at Rover. We occasionally hear from the Tories that they matter. One of the Minister's colleagues behind him is nodding assent. Does the Minister agree that they matter just as much as shareholders? Will he ask the chairman to meet the trade unions to explain about the bid from BAe and where Rover fits into the picture?

Mr. Clarke: As my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) was provoked into remarking a moment ago, not surprisingly consultation with the trade unions was no doubt complicated by the rather foolish strike that was taking place at Solihull at the time that the negotiations were under way. However, I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman puts his point to the chairman of the Rover Group he will be reassured about reasonable relationships with the trade unions. I suspect that large numbers of trade unionists inside the Rover Group rather welcome the proposed deal with BAe and think that it offers them a good stable future in the private sector.

Mr. Oppenheim: When will my right hon. and learned Friend scrap the so-called gentleman's agreement by which we put up non-tariff barriers against Japanese cars? Is it not true that those non-tariff barriers benefit Japanese manufacturers by giving them a cosy high-price market in which to sell, compound the inefficiency of the British industry and cost consumers dear?

Mr. Clarke: We keep such agreements under review inside the Government. I have considerable sympathy with my hon. Friend's point of view that, on closer analysis, such deals often turn out to be of considerable advantage to Japanese importers by guaranteeing higher prices for a lower volume of sales than they would otherwise be able to have.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Will the Chancellor clarify the precise allocation of the £800 million cash injection? Can he confirm reports that, depending on the definition of debts in the Rover Group's balance sheet, a surplus of between £43 million and £240 million will accrue to BAe? What guarantees can he give that that money will be invested in jobs and new vehicles, and not used to inflate BAe's share price?

Mr. Clarke: The figure of £800 million was a reasonable estimate of the level of debt likely to be faced by the company at the time of completion of sale. I think that the hon. Gentleman has, understandably, been disturbed by some of the interpretations that have been put upon the Rover Group's annual accounts which were published recently. The figure of debt shown there was the figure at 31 December 1987, not at the expected date of completion of sale. The figure in the published accounts leaves out the provision that has already had to be made for restructuring costs that will be incurred following the changes made in Leyland Trucks. When one takes into account further additional losses likely to be made this year, one comes to the £800 million, which was the Government's best judgment.

Mr. Wells: Will my right hon. and learned Friend quickly resume the proper position of a Minister in the Department of Trade and Industry in relation to the Rover Group and advocate to the chairman of the Rover Group that he takes quick action to invest in Land Rover so that new models can be produced, so that spare parts can be provided to those who have bought from Rover in the past and so that service and marketing arrangements, which have been woefully inadequate, can be improved dramatically within the next nine months in order to make the industry one of the great growth industries in Britain?

Mr. Clarke: I am sure that the proper role of a Minister of Trade and Industry is to leave such matters to the commercial judgment of the owners of the company, but I am sure that the chairman of the company would acknowledge the force of some of my hon. Friend's criticisms. Land Rover is obviously a very attractive part of the business. It should have a very strong future and I am sure that the present management, under new or present ownership, will take steps to ensure that its performance is everything that we would desire.

Mr. Blair: Returning to what the right hon. and learned Gentleman was saying a moment ago, is it not the case that, on any basis, the £800 million cash injection is a generous estimate of indebtedness and that it is certain to leave some surplus over and above the indebtedness of the Rover Group? In those circumstances, is not the failure to achieve any guarantees on investment, model development or jobs all the more extraordinary and lamentable? What was the right hon. and learned Gentleman's Department doing over the past few weeks? Was it conducting a genuine commercial negotiation on behalf of the taxpayer, or was it getting rid of Rover at any price?

Mr. Clarke: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's assertion. In more detailed discussions with the European Commission, I trust that we shall be able to satisfy it that we are making reasonable provision.

I am not sure what the point of the hon. Gentleman's attacks is. His comments slightly contradict those made a moment ago by his hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), who feared that there might be some reduction in the amount of public money going into the company. We are interested, not just in injecting public money into the company, but in making a reasonable and

proper deal. The deal is based on what we think is a good estimate of the level of bank indebtedness of this company at the time of the likely completion of the sale.

Single European Market

8. **Mr. Sackville:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received about his campaign to publicise the approach of a European single market.

Mr. Maude: We are continuing to receive a large number of representations, all of which warmly support our campaign to alert British business to the challenge of completing the single market. The major phase of our campaign starts with a national conference at Lancaster House next Monday, 18 April.

Mr. Sackville: Does my hon. Friend agree that the concept of the single market will suffer if monopolistic concerns in Europe, such as airlines or steel producers, continue to operate cartels, unofficial or official, to the great detriment of users and, indeed, to employment?

Mr. Maude: One of the objects of the completion of the single market is to make sure that competition operates within the market to the benefit of consumers.

Mr. Beith: Would it not be to the advantage of British business if we had joined the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system by the time we join the single market? In that case, why is the Minister of Trade and Industry saying that the time is not yet right to join the EMS? Will he still be saying that in 1992, if he is still there?

Mr. Maude: It is not for people in my position to predict the future. My right hon. and learned Friend makes his point about when he thinks is the right time to join the ERM and no doubt those making the decision will hear what he says.

Sir Ian Lloyd: Have the Government made any attempt yet to estimate what are likely to be the massive savings that should be made in British Customs administration from 1992 onwards?

Mr. Maude: There should be significant administrative savings. There are also estimated to be significant economic advantages to the whole of the Community. A report by the European Commission indicates that there should be increases to the Community's GNP of about £140 billion. Obviously, that has a major advantage for us. To those who say that the advantages will go one way, I say that that is a sad reflection on the competitiveness of British business. I believe that British business is now well placed to benefit from the opportunities that the single market will offer.

Mr. Grocott: Does the Minister remember all the public relations effort at the time of our original entry into the Common Market setting out the tremendous advantages to British industry? Will he check the figures and show the continually increasing deficit in manufacturing industry between Britain and other members of the European Community? Why the hell should we believe him this time when we know that the previous time——

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I thought that I heard a somewhat unparliamentary word—why on earth would be more appropriate.

Mr. Maude: I dimly remember in the recesses of my memory what was said about the Common Market in the early 1970s, although I was a very young man at the time. To those who say that British business would not gain from the single market, I say that they are quite simply wrong. The United Kingdom is already open for trade to a greater extent than the rest of the Community. It must, therefore, be in our interests to open up the rest of Europe for British business.

Mr. Dykes: How on earth or how in hell can we have——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us have it on earth.

Mr. Dykes: How on earth can we have a single European market without harmonising indirect taxes?

Mr. Maude: I point out to my hon. Friend that the United States of America has had a very satisfactory single market for 200 years with some 50 different rates of sales tax in different states—not only different rates of sales tax, but quite often different systems of sales tax as well.

Mr. Gould: What will be the Government's response to the European Commission's insistence that the provisions in the case of Rolls-Royce and British Aerospace which limit foreign shareholdings to 15 per cent. should now be abandoned? Does the Government's enthusiasm for the internal market mean that they are ready to give up that essential protection for strategic British interests?

Mr. Maude: We shall continue to argue the British interest as strongly as we have in the past.

Mr. Curry: Will my hon. Friend also direct his information campaign to potential investors? Does he realise the importance that overseas companies attach to being inside the market by the time that it is completed? Is he aware of the studies that suggest that by the early part of the next decade a quarter of a million manufacturing jobs in Britain will be taken up by Japanese companies, an important proportion of which will be Wales? Is he aware that that is partly a consequence of the anxiety of those companies to be inside Europe before the internal market is completed?

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend has made a very good point. We are already an extremely attractive environment for foreign investors. That is very much to the benefit of the United Kingdom. It has created many jobs especially, if I may say so, in manufacturing industry. I am sure that the consideration to which my hon. Friend has drawn attention is material.

Electronics Industry

10. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the output of the electronics industry at the latest date for which figures are available; and what was the comparable figure in 1979.

Mr. Butcher: The index of production for the electronics and information technology industries was 170 in 1987 based on 1980 being equal to 100. This compares with 97 in 1979.

Mr. Pike: As imports of electrical goods have more than trebled since 1979, is there not a case for retaining the voluntary restraint agreements with regard to imports of electrical goods from the far east? Will not those imports

pose a serious threat to our television tube and set manufacturers, as there is a surplus of production in Japan and a growing surplus of capacity in South Korea?

Mr. Butcher: No. The increase in voluntary restraint agreements would cause immediate and long-term damage to the British economy. I want to stress to the hon. Gentleman that, if we consider the OECD group of countries as a whole, only Japan is improving its export-import ratio. Virtually all the others are falling. The export-import ratio in the United Kingdom fell by 17 per cent. It was also 17 per cent. in Germany. In France it was 21 per cent. and in the United States of America it was 40 per cent. There is a healthy increase in our electronic engineering output. If current trends continue, we can start to attack import penetration.

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend will be aware of the growing use of electronic systems in companies such as British Aerospace in my constituency. Will he do all he can to communicate to his Government colleagues the need for the availability of trained manpower to exploit fully that important growth in our industrial world?

Mr. Butcher: I chaired a skills shortage committee three years ago which was targeted on improving the level and supply of skills in those disciplines which my hon. Friend is anxious to see enhanced—electronic engineering and manufacturing systems engineering. Within the trade figures for the electronics sector, aerospace is excluded yet we export a lot of electronics within aerospace, whereas there is a huge Japanese surplus in consumer electronics. The situation in information technology as a whole is not as bad as the overall figures would appear to show.

Single European Market

11. **Dr. Thomas:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what studies have been made by his Department of the impact of the realisation of the Economic Community internal market in 1992 on the regions and nations within the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: The completion of the single market means greater freedom of trade, and many studies from various sources have shown that this will bring benefits to all nations and regions within the European Community. We have commissioned few formal studies, but economic analysis is carried out within the Department of Trade and Industry in the course of providing advice to Ministers.

Dr. Thomas: Will the Minister accept that the benefits, or disbenefits, of the single market depend very much on the distribution of those benefits among the multinational companies, the work forces and, in particular, the regions that will benefit? Does he agree that as part of the integration of the market there is need also for a parallel integration and enhancement of social policy, of social fund spending, and of regional investment?

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman will know that it has recently been agreed in the Community that the structural fund should be doubled in the next few years, so the contribution made by structural funds to the regions of the United Kingdom will be increased. I hope the hon. Gentleman accepts that that will be beneficial. I take the point that he broadly makes, that success for regions depends on the distribution of benefits, but there is no reason why successful businesses in the regions of the United Kingdom should not benefit if they are competitive.

Mr. Gow: How resolute will my hon. Friend be before and after 1992 in asserting the proposition that the rates and scope of value added tax and other indirect taxes imposed upon the British people should be matters for the Chancellor of the Exchequer and this House and not for the Commission?

Mr. Maude: It will not fall to me to be resolute or irresolute about it, but I can assure my hon. Friend that the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister intend to be very resolute.

Mr. McCartney: One of the possible effects of the operation of the internal market may be to allow into this country combustion-modified foam and other foams which—after February next year—it will be illegal to sell here. Will the Minister refute the statement issued by Conservative Members of the European Parliament that the British Government should go back on that commitment and accept lower safety standards, such as are currently allowed in Belgium, West Germany and Italy, so that when the internal market comes into operation such dangerous types of foam can re-emerge and be sold on the British market? Is it not a disgrace that this major step forward should be undermined by Conservative Members of the European Parliament?

Mr. Maude: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we have no intention of going back on the decision which I announced in January about foam in furniture. Those regulations will apply to any furniture supplied in this country, no matter what its origin.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Has my hon. Friend noted that the Cecchini report, to which he referred indirectly in an earlier answer, suggests that the single market will add 5 per cent. to the gross domestic product of the European Community as a whole? Will he confirm that it is up to industry in the regions and in this country generally to take full advantage of the opportunities that he is drawing to their attention in the 1992 publicity campaign, and also that it is essential that the regions press for the continuation of this Government's economic policies, which make our country more attractive in the European Community than others?

Mr. Maude: The report to which my hon. Friend refers has not yet been published, but the Commission has previewed some of its contents, which show that there are major economic benefits to flow from the completion of the single market. My hon. Friend is absolutely right when he says that the success of this Government's economic policies has not only made the United Kingdom very attractive to investment but has made British business fitter, more supple, more resilient and better equipped to take advantage of the opportunities of 1992 than under any previous regime.

Mr. Dalyell: Are Ministers at all queasy about approaching the single market when our research and science funding is much less satisfactory than in competitor countries? How about inviting Sir George Porter to breakfast and answering his television lecture on Sunday night? Would the Minister be ready to do that?

Mr. Maude: Sir George Porter is very welcome to come and have breakfast whenever he wishes, and we would have an interesting conversation.

In response to the first part of the question, no, we are neither anxious nor queasy.

Polystyrene

12. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has any plans to further restrict the use of polystyrene, in the light of the latest research on fire risks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: When polystyrene is used to provide a filling for an article of upholstered furniture it will be required, following proposals in the currently circulated draft regulations, to conform to the requirement for "other fillings", that is, other than polyurethane foam and latex rubber foam.

Mr. Stern: In view of the dangers perceived by fire officers and the general public in the domestic use of polystyrene foam, especially in ceiling tiles, does my hon. Friend have any plans to extend the furniture studies, which have already been so welcome, into the use of that foam, with a view to safeguarding the public against that fire risk?

Mr. Butcher: As my hon. Friend will know, our attention is focused on polyurethane foam, given its toxic and occasionally tragically lethal capabilities. Our research on polystyrene is admittedly now some years old but comes from the Fire Research Station, and shows that when used as specified, polystyrene tiles are not a significant addition to the fire hazard. However, in the light of the correspondence that my hon. Friend has sent me and his comments today, I shall ask the Fire Research Station to update that earlier report to ascertain whether it can identify a significant hazard.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is the Minister aware that many people are now very worried about the fire hazards of artificial materials? Will he run a campaign to make it clear to people whether their existing furniture and ceiling tiles are dangerous, for otherwise many people will continue to be utterly confused? They need such information to be able to take sensible and informed decisions.

Mr. Butcher: I can understand the hon. Lady's concern. She will know that we shall be introducing the most rigorous fire prevention regime in the world for foam-filled furniture and furniture covers. We do not have recent information to show that polystyrene presents the sort of danger that the hon. Lady currently suspects. However, as I said earlier, to have complete peace of mind I shall ask the Fire Research Station to take another look at it.

British Steel

13. **Mr. Grylls:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received from private sector steel companies about the proposed role of British Steel in the private sector.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry (Mr. Robert Atkins): I have received no formal representations from private sector steel companies on this subject.

Mr. Grylls: Does my hon. Friend accept that if we are seeking to establish a fair market in Europe it is important that the steel quotas should be abolished so that the efficient firms in our country can prosper?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend will be well aware that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is at the forefront of a campaign to do just what my hon. Friend wants.

Mr. Crowther: Bearing in mind that the present level of profitability in BSC is only just a little above what Sir Robert Scholey says he needs every year for reinvestment, is it not obvious that the Government are rushing BSC into the private sector because Ministers want to get it off their hands before it is hit by the full impact of electricity price increases, which will reduce its competitiveness, and before it is thrown into a cut-throat price war in Europe following the abolition of quotas? What assurance can the Minister give the House that a privatised BSC would be able to prosper or even to survive in those circumstances, and without the kind of backing that its competitors in Europe will certainly get from their Governments?

Mr. Atkins: We are entirely happy with the achievements of the chairman of British Steel, together with the work force. We are more than satisfied that the sort of effort that is being put into making the company successful now will help it to be just as successful when it returns to the private sector, where it belongs.

Mr. Oppenheim: Is it not true that steel quotas cost jobs in the steel-consuming industries by pushing up the price of steel? Will my hon. Friend put up a firm fight against the European steel producers who are pushing for an extension of those pernicious quotas, which do our economy nothing but harm?

Mr. Atkins: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Hardy: Is it not the case that in the Federal Republic legal action is being prepared, not only against Finsider, the Italian steel company, but against the British Steel Corporation? In view of that development, is it not reasonable to suggest that a proper response should be offered and any difficulties surmounted before any further progress is made along the course of privatisation?

Mr. Atkins: I understand that the West German Iron and Steel Federation has complained to the European Commission about the Commission's approval of payments made to BSC between 1975 and 1985, which were approved by the Commission under the rules operating at that time. It is not a new complaint. Similar complaints have been made by German industry in the past and they have been rejected by the European Commission. It is, of course, for the Commission to consider the present complaint. We reject any allegations that illegal state subsidies have been paid to BSC in the past, since all those payments were approved by the Commission. BSC is now profitable and self-supporting.

Mr. Morley: We have been talking about the single market in the EEC. If BSC is returned to the private sector, will it not have to compete in unfair conditions in the sense that it has to face energy costs which are being used as a form of indirect taxation and to pad out the proposed privatisation, and rate support grant cuts which again are being used as a form of indirect taxation? That means that

BSC will not be able to compete on equal terms. Or do the Government not care, once it is out of their control and responsibility?

Mr. Atkins: These are matters for the British Steel Corporation. As I said earlier, we are satisfied with the judgment of the chairman, the board and the work force of British Steel about being able to cope, because they want to be returned to the private sector.

Advice and Debt Counselling Services

16. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what discussions he has had with credit companies, banks and other financial institutions about his suggestion that they should fund independent agencies to provide free money advice and debt counselling services; what discussions he has had with organisations currently involved in the provision of advice services; and what responses he has received in each case.

Mr. Maude: I have had a number of meetings with representatives of the financial sector at which I have stressed the importance of money advice and encouraged the principle of companies and associations providing financial and other support to voluntary bodies concerned with the provision of money advice. It is for these bodies to seek support from industry for specific projects.

As I said in my reply to the hon. Member on 9 March, a number of money advice support projects have already been funded by the private sector through the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, and others. I hope that this trend will continue.

Mr. Michael: Does the Minister not accept that that is a wholly inadequate answer and a complete abrogation of responsibility on his part? Does he not accept that, in view of the insultingly light answer given by the Secretary of State for Social Services, who is doing so much to increase debt problems, the Government as a whole have a responsibility to take positive action? Will he take positive action to persuade those to whom he is passing the buck that they should make a significant contribution if he continues to refuse to do so?

Mr. Maude: For one thing, we already provide substantial support to the advice services. We support them to the extent of some £9 million for central services. That was increased specifically for the purpose of providing information on the new social security system. I already do a certain amount to persuade the financial services industry to provide support in the way that the hon. Gentleman suggests. I seem to have been persuasive, because a number of projects are going ahead.

Mr. Boswell: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. While I do not agree fully with the argument of the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), may I ask my hon. Friend to accept that the problem of debt is growing, for reasons which are multiple and complex, and that it is an important part of the responsibility of the private sector, which is generally offering the debt, to take action in the public interest? Will he reinforce with the private sector the importance of its part, in conjunction with him and others, in dealing with the problem?

Mr. Maude: It seems to me that it is not only part of the responsibility of the private sector, but is very much in its commercial interest to provide support for money advice services. The more people who are helped to resolve their debt problems, the more money will be recovered by those who lent money in the first place. Advice services to those bodies concerned with giving money advice might find it useful to approach, for example, the utilities which supply fuel on credit, which forms part of most people's debt problems.

Mr. Skinner: Why should there be different laws for people and for banks in relation to debt? Why should banks be able to to go to the Inland Revenue and say, "We have run into trouble with debts abroad; can you give us £1 billion to spread among the top four banks?", while ordinary people who have got up to the neck in debt because of Government policy are told that they will have to find another loan? It is no wonder that the residual income which goes in debt payments for every family in Britain has risen to over 80 per cent., whereas it was just over 40 per cent. in 1979. We have a Prime Minister who preaches thrift and no borrowing, yet the country is up to the neck in debt.

Mr. Maude: For the vast majority of individuals, the increase in credit that has undoubtedly taken place has been wholly beneficial. It has enabled them to even out peaks and troughs in their household budgeting. I repeat that it has been wholly beneficial. But for a small minority of people, debt problems arise. It is for such purposes that money advice services exist.

Inner London Education Authority (Poll)

3.30 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the result of the London parents' poll and the future of the Inner London education authority."

As hon. Members will no doubt have heard, the parents of children in inner London schools undertook a poll to find out their opinions on the future of the Inner London education authority. Of a total of 265,596 ballot papers that were issued to parents—one on behalf of each child in an ILEA school—145,259 were returned. The parents were asked to state whether they were in favour of or against the transfer of education functions to inner London local authorities. Voting took place, and 8,004 voted in favour of a transfer, and 137,021 voted against a transfer. In other words, 94·3 per cent. of the votes were against the transfer, which represents an absolute majority of all those who were eligible to vote in the election, and 51·6 per cent. of parents of London children have said no to a transfer.

The matter is urgent and specific simply because, halfway through the Committee stage of the Education Reform Bill, in the most cavalier fashion possible, the Government introduced an amendment to destroy the Inner London education authority and impose massive cuts on education spending throughout inner London. The Government even refused to meet parent delegations, refused to support the idea of the parents' poll, and did nothing but smear parents' efforts to conduct the poll. I remind Conservative Members that the Electoral Reform Society counted the votes. There can be no dubiety about that. The Government forced the issue through the House in a most disgraceful manner. We must debate the matter because the parents of London children have said clearly, emphatically and simply that they wish to retain a unitary education system for inner London.

For the sake of the reputation of the House and of democracy in this country, it is now incumbent on the House to agree that it is necessary once more urgently to debate the future of the Inner London education authority so that the views of parents, who are anxious to protect their children's education, further and adult education and the principles of a free education service, can be properly debated and reflected upon in the House.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that you will be prepared to recognise the urgency and importance of the matter and will grant leave for a debate.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member has asked leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the result of the London parents' poll and the future of the Inner London education authority."

I listened with careful attention to what the hon. Member said. I regret that I do not consider the matter that he has raised as being appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman and the House will have further opportunities to debate the matter.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Of course we entirely accept your decision, but as we have just heard the most powerful expression of parent power that has ever taken place in any Western democracy, is it not appropriate for the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science either to make a statement now or to inform the House that a statement will be forthcoming?

Mr. Speaker: I have had no notification of a statement today.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. The proposal to abolish the Inner London education authority was never put to the electorate. The Government have no mandate for it. They did not include the proposal in the Education Reform Bill when it was first put to the House; it was introduced only after the Bill had been published. As you, Sir, may recall, we asked that, in the circumstances, the Government at least postpone the debate on the part of the Bill that related to ILEA until the poll had been properly conducted by the Electoral Reform Society so that the parents of London might have an opportunity to express their view. In line with the Government's——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This seems to me to be an argument of Government policy and not a question of order. Will the hon. Gentleman come to his point of order?

Mr. Dobson: As you, Sir, frequently and rightly say, it is your duty as the Speaker to sustain the democratic reputation of the House. No Member of this House, elected in a general election as recently as June 1987, has a mandate to abolish the Inner London education authority. Hon. Members who support that proposition said that they wished——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have a Standing Order No. 20 debate this afternoon. The hon. Gentleman must raise a point of order that I can answer. It is not right that he should seek an opportunity to make a political point on a Bill which has already received its Third Reading in the House.

Mr. Dobson: I acknowledge that the Bill has received its Third Reading in this House; but it never received a first reading at the general election. We want to know whether you, Mr. Speaker, have received any representations from the Government seeking to make a statement, to reconsider the part of the Bill dealing with ILEA or in any way to reflect the democratic decision of the parents of inner London.

Mr. Speaker: I repeat that I have received no such application. As I said to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) a few moments ago, I have no doubt that this will be the subject of debate when the Bill returns from another place.

BILL PRESENTED

FOREIGN NUCLEAR, CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL BASES (PROHIBITION)

Mr. Tony Benn, supported by Mr. Eric S. Heffer, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Ms. Dawn Primarolo, Mr. Dennis Skinner, Mr. Bob Clay, Mr. John Hughes, Mr. Harry Cohen, Mr. Bill Michie, Ms. Diane Abbott, Mr. Pat Wall and Mr. Dave Nellist, presented a Bill to prohibit by law the siting of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons under the ownership or control or joint control of foreign countries within the United Kingdom, the British Isles or British territorial waters or British airspace or bases; and for purposes connected therewith: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 138.]

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the draft Meat and Livestock Commission Levy (Variation) Scheme (Confirmation) Order 1988, be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

Indecent Displays (Newspapers)

3.38 pm

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make illegal the display of pictures of naked or partially naked women in sexually provocative poses in newspapers.

The purpose of the Bill is to remove from newspapers pictures of partially naked or naked women in sexually provocative poses and to make the publication of such pictures punishable with a fine relating to the newspaper's circulation. The proposal follows closely the principle of the Indecent Display (Control) Act 1981, which lays down that pictures that might legally be allowed in magazines cannot be put on public hoardings. I believe that the same argument should apply to newspapers.

I first introduced this Bill two years ago and you will recall, Mr. Speaker, that on that occasion the House—particularly a large rump of Conservative Members—misbehaved fairly grossly. With some Conservative support, we won the vote on that occasion, but the Bill failed because a succession of Conservative Members objected each time that it came up for Second Reading. They did not even have the guts to stand up and say who they were, but objected anonymously.

I seek to reintroduce the Bill, partly because of the overwhelming support that the proposal has received since it was introduced. I have received more than 5,000 letters, the overwhelming majority from women but a significant number from men, supporting the proposal. Some of the letters are very moving and distressing. I have received about 12 from women who have been raped and who say that when they were raped the men said that they reminded them of a woman on page 3 or that they ought to be on page 3.

I have received many letters from women who were sexually assaulted and who say that every time they are exposed to such pictures it reminds them of the assault and they find it extremely distressing. I have received hundreds of letters from women who speak about sitting on a bus or the tube or being at work and seeing men reading papers and making comments that offend them deeply. I have received letters from women who have had breasts removed because of cancer and who are deeply hurt when sometimes even their husbands buy newspapers and bring them into the home.

I have received hundreds of letters from teachers who talk about children being asked to bring newspapers into school to cover desks during art lessons. They talk of little boys of six and seven giggling and joking over the pictures, while the little girls do not know what to do. That is some indication of the way in which such newspapers are helping to shape attitudes in our society.

The last category of letters, and perhaps the most upsetting, are those from young women who were sexually abused as children and who talk about the way in which the man who abused them, often the father or a close relative, used such pictures and pornography to justify the sexual abuse.

The overwhelming majority of those who write argue that the pictures degrade women and portray them as sexual objects to be used and taken whenever men feel the need to do so. It is the overwhelming view of those who wrote to me, and it is also my view, that the mass

[Ms. Clare Short]

circulation of these pictures—we are talking about 10 million every day of every week of every year and about twice that number of adults and large numbers of children who see them—helps to create a sexual culture that encourages sexual assaults on women and rape and sexual abuse of women and children.

The wide distribution of such pictures helps to legitimise the harder and nastier porn, the circulation of which is also growing rapidly in our society. Some of those who oppose my Bill argue that they have some sympathy for it but that it would be wrong to censor the press. I should like to address that argument. The British press is owned by a very small number of extremely rich men. It seems quite extraordinary to suggest that that small number of people can define freedom while the rest of us are not allowed to impose some constraints on what they print and circulate. Quite rightly, we have restrictions on material that excites racial hatred. We should also have restrictions on material that degrades women.

It is far from certain that the readers of these newspapers want the pictures. Every easy-to-read newspaper in Britain carries such pictures, but only one of them, *The Star*, has ever consulted its readers. The majority of those who bought the paper and responded to the poll said that they wanted the pictures to be removed. The last time that I introduced my Bill it was followed by a campaign in one of our lowest level newspapers, the *Sun*, which wanted to stop "crazy Clare" from introducing the Bill. Readers were asked to send for car stickers and to write using Freepost to say how they objected to the Bill. Ever since that time the *Sun* has refused to tell anyone how many stickers were circulated and how many people wrote in.

A small number of dirty-minded newspaper owners and editors who despise their readers think that they have to serve up such material in order to sell some of their nasty politics. It is not the wish of the people who buy the newspapers that such material should be widely circulated in our society.

I hope very much that the House will overwhelmingly support this measure. I do not pretend that it will prevent all sexual attacks on women or stop the degradation of women. However, it would be one big step in that direction, and the House should be united in supporting it.

3.45 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): This is an intolerant measure and is typical of the authoritarianism we have seen in the modern Labour party. In this I have some sympathy with the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), because I am beginning to understand what he is saying about this trait in the modern Labour party.

This measure sits ill with the Opposition's criticisms about the censorship of the press, the authoritarian attitude of Government Members or the Government's attitude towards the press. I hope that Opposition Members will think carefully about that before they vote on this measure.

What upsets Opposition Members is that this matter is about choice. It is about the choice exercised freely every day by millions of people. As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) has admitted, millions of people in this country exercise their choice freely to purchase newspapers and to look, among other things, at whatever may be displayed in them.

Perhaps more importantly, it is about the choice made by the young ladies themselves as to whether they display themselves in the newspapers. I wonder what it is that the hon. Member for Ladywood finds so objectionable about adult young ladies deciding whether they will exploit the audience for those newspapers. She has talked about the exploitation of them, but I wonder whether she had considered how successfully young ladies choose to display for profit whatever assets they possess and benefit and exploit the male population of this country. It may well be that she wishes to protect the wrong people.

What distinction is made between the honourable place of the nude in the history of art and sculpture and the portrayal—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We often hear things in the Chamber with which we may disagree.

Mr. Forth: What distinction——

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): Name one painting.

Mr. Forth: For the benefit of the House I will name the sculpture "The Kiss" by Rodin, which is generally accepted as a great work of art and which portrays two naked people in an embrace.

Mr. Sedgemore: Name one painting.

Mr. Forth: Why is it that the prurient minds of Opposition Members see unclad young ladies as being disgusting? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am listening with great interest to what is being said, but I cannot hear properly if there are interruptions from below the Gangway.

Mr. Forth: I would cite further the works of Titian or Reubens and many other great artists who have portrayed through the centuries ladies in various stages of undress whose pictures have been regarded as art.

The Bill is defective in its detail—*[Interruption.]* I do not know why Opposition Members are afraid to hear the argument. Perhaps they are embarrassed by what their hon. Friend is proposing.

Mr. Sedgemore: What Titian painting is the hon. Gentleman talking about?

Mr. Forth: Will the hon. Gentleman settle down?

Mr. Speaker: Order. All I can hear from below the Gangway is some chant about a painting. This Bill is about displays in newspapers.

Mr. Forth: The measure is defective in its detail because the hon. Member for Ladywood failed to tell us who will define what is meant by "partially clad". Who decides between clad, partially clad or unclad? More importantly, and perhaps more relevant, what is a sexually provocative pose? Perhaps the hon. Lady can identify or knows a sexually provocative pose when she sees one, but I do not know whether she expects the readers, editors or publishers of the newspapers so to do. She has not described in the Bill where the responsibility for the identification of "partially clad" or "sexually provocative" will lie.

This is a grossly irresponsible and defective measure, and, for all those reasons, I hope that the House will reject it. It is intolerant and impractical and flies in the face of the freely exercised choice of most people in this country.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at Commencement of Public Business):—

The House divided: Ayes 163, Noes 48.

Division No. 252] **[3.50 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bidwell, Sydney
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Butler, Chris
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Patrick
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marlow, Tony
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Rhodes James, Robert
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Robin
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Widdecombe, Ann
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Ann Clwyd, and
Ms. Jo Richardson.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkinson, David
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Budgen, Nicholas
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carttiss, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Day, Stephen
Emery, Sir Peter
Farr, Sir John
Fearn, Ronald
Fox, Sir Marcus
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Gregory, Conal
Grylls, Michael
Haselhurst, Alan
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Holt, Richard
Jessel, Toby
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Lawrence, Ivan
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Moate, Roger
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Warren, Kenneth
Whitney, Ray
Wiggin, Jerry

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Forth and
Mr. Jerry Hayes.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms. Clare Short, Ms. Jo Richardson, Mrs. Margaret Beckett, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Mr. John Battle, Mr. Bill Michie, Mrs. Ann Taylor, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Ms. Diane Abbott, Ms. Marjorie Mowlam and Miss Emma Nicholson.

Indecent Displays (Newspapers)

Ms. Clare Short accordingly presented a Bill to make illegal the display of pictures of naked or partially naked women in sexually provocative poses in newspapers: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 6 May and to be printed. [Bill 140.]

Social Security System (Changes)

Mr. Speaker: I have received an enormous number of applications from hon. Members on both sides of the House to take part in the debate. It would be extremely helpful if both Front Bench speakers would make brief speeches and if Back-Benchers would confine their speech to five minutes. There is hardly a constituency that is not affected by the changes in one way or another. It is my wish that most of those who want to take part in the debate should be able to do so.

4.2 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I beg to move, That this House do now adjourn.

Leave having been given on Tuesday 12 April under Standing Order No. 20 to discuss:

The impact of the changes in the social security system.

Today we are debating the impact of the social security changes that have been phased in over the past fortnight. The Government claim that these changes represent the biggest upheaval in social security in 40 years. It is certainly the biggest upheaval since the Government came to power, but I would not want it to be thought that this Government have been idle over the past nine years. In that time they have abolished the link between pensions and earnings, which means that the pension for a married couple is £14 less than it would otherwise be.

The Government have also abolished the short-term sickness benefit and the earnings-related supplementary unemployment benefit and they have taken what is left of unemployment benefit into taxation. They have repeatedly not uprated child benefit, so that it is now worth almost 10 per cent. less than it was worth in 1979, in real terms. They have removed the board and lodging allowance from all claimants under 25 on social security and, worst of all, over the past two years they have just about halved expenditure on single payments. That is quite a record.

Against that background, it took real determination to succeed in devising a new system that was even more mean than the one that it replaced and that leaves some people even worse off than they were under the previous system. The question at the heart of the debate is how many are worse off. Everyone on the Treasury Bench, from the Olympian height of the Prime Minister to the humble and retiring manner of the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), has asserted that only 12 per cent. will be worse off as a result of the changes. It may help if I clarify the basis of that claim. It is based on two sources of data.

The first is a sample of claimants on supplementary benefit that was taken in February 1986, two years ago. The second is a family expenditure survey of data collected in 1985, three years ago. It is not a careful census of 8 million people affected by the changes. It is an estimate based on a sample that is small in relation to the millions affected, and it is a sample taken at a time so long ago that most of those who are now on social security were not claiming it at the time. It is also a calculation that wondrously treats the abolition of single payments as not being a cut at all.

The problem for the Secretary of State and for his Government colleagues in defending that estimate is that no organisation that has studied the impact of last week's changes agrees with it. Ministers and this Government are the victim of their own arrogance. They arrogantly believe that nobody deserves to be listened to and taken seriously unless they are employed by and working within the Government.

There was a superb example of that arrogance yesterday during the exchanges at Prime Minister's Question Time from the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), who played such a distinguished part in our proceedings earlier this afternoon. When my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) referred to the citizens advice bureaux and suggested that they were not militant, the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire interjected in his characteristically urbane fashion and said that they are all Trots. I am bound to say that that casts a new light on Sir Kenneth Clucas, the chair of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, new light that the security services would be interested in receiving, as Sir Kenneth was for three years a permanent secretary under this Government.

It is a measure of the Government's lack of confidence that they have commissioned no research of their own into the effect of these changes. I suggest that they ought to look at the work of bodies that have carried out research into the changes, such as the Policy Studies Institute. They cannot all be Trots. Indeed, the Government commissioned research from the Policy Studies Institute. As the director of the institute pointed out last month, the Government have ignored all the results of its research in preparing the new social security system, even though the institute was considered to be reliable enough to be commissioned to undertake research. Last month, the Policy Studies Institute calculated that the losers are not 12 per cent. but 48 per cent. That may not be a reliable figure, because the PSI based its calculation on data supplied by the Department of Health and Social Security.

Let me turn to the Oxford department of social administration, which wisely shunned information from the DHSS and carried out a study of 186 claimants in Oxford during the past month. It concluded that two thirds of them lose in cash terms, even if we do not count the abolition of single payments, and that three quarters lose in cash terms if we count the abolition of single payments. The research unit at Nottingham university has studied Nottingham on a ward-by-ward basis. Wandsworth has also been studied on a ward-by-ward basis on behalf of Wandsworth council—another well-known bunch of Trots. Both studies discovered that the losers outnumbered the gainers by 2:1.

Since I represent a Scottish constituency, let me pray in aid Strathclyde social work department. It studied 200 claimants last month and concluded that 154 of them would be worse off in cash terms. Like the Oxford study, but unlike the Government's figures, that is not an estimate; it is a head count of real claimants from samples that date not from 1985 but from 1988.

Ministers cannot even convince their own staff who daily see the claimants. Those staff, in advance of the changes, have insisted on floor to ceiling security to protect them from the frustration that they expect from claimants.

Perhaps the unkindest cut of all comes from the Social Security Advisory Committee, set up by the present Government as a source of independent, authoritative advice which they could then ignore. Last week, the committee produced its annual report. The chairman, Mr. Peter Barclay—another unconscious Trotskyist—put the

losers not at 12 per cent., but at 43 per cent. That figure has since been quoted as that of the Social Security Advisory Committee. In fairness, it should be put on record that it is not the committee's figure; it is the Government's own figure. It dates from the tables produced by them in November, which showed that 3,650,000 claimants would be better off if they simply kept the old scheme and uprated it by 3 per cent. for inflation.

With all its faults—with all the cuts that I paraded at the start—and not even taking into account the abolition of single payments, 3,650,000 claimants are worse off under the new scheme than under the old one. We can only conclude that Ministers consider that the principal fault of the old scheme was that it was too generous to too many people. Yet the Prime Minister persists in stating that 88 per cent. are better off, or no worse off. She reaches that simple conclusion on the basis that, although many people now have a lower entitlement to benefit, the DHSS does not actually take the cash away from them. Even the present Government shrank from that step. Instead, they simply let the benefit shrivel away with inflation.

One claimant among that 88 per cent. is Mr. St. Clair, a resident of Cornwall. His wife had a stroke two years ago, and since then has been paralysed. The only movement that she can make is to blink her eyelids. Mr. St. Clair left work two years ago to nurse her. She cannot swallow, because she is totally paralysed, and therefore all her food must be liquidised, which is an expensive process.

To be fair, the local DHSS staff appear to have pulled out all the stops to give Mr. and Mrs. St. Clair the maximum help. They currently receive £89 a week in benefit. Under the new rules, they are entitled to £70 a week. Of course, Mr. and Mrs. St. Clair are not losers. Their cash is not being taken away. Their benefit has been frozen at its present level until their new entitlement catches up, which at the present rates of inflation will mean their benefit remaining frozen until 1995. Nevertheless, they are among the 88 per cent. paraded as being no worse off.

It is worse than that, however. Mr. and Mrs. St. Clair advise me that they live in a two-storey cottage. Every night Mr. St. Clair carries his wife up and down the stairs. He had arranged to buy a single-storey bungalow. An additional £9 would be paid to him by the DHSS to cope with the additional cost. Under the new rules, that £9 is not added to his cash benefit; it is only added to his notional entitlement under the new rules, bringing that entitlement up to £79—less than its present level in cash—and leaving Mr. and Mrs. St. Clair not a penny better off. The purchase of the bungalow has fallen through and, every night, Mr. St. Clair carries Mrs. St. Clair up and down the stairs. None the less, we are told by the Prime Minister and every Minister in the Government that Mr. and Mrs. St. Clair are not losers.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): This is a very complicated case. As the hon. Gentleman may appreciate, I had some dealing with it over a period. There is a conflict between the figures that I was given and those that the hon. Gentleman has given. I was told that, as the hon. Gentleman has said, until now the supplementary benefit payment to the St. Clairs has been £89·73 a week, but that income support has been awarded at £93 a week. There may be a reason for the difference between the figures, but I consider it only right that my figures should be put on the record.

Mr. Cook: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. My figures, however, come straight from Mr. St. Clair, with whom I discussed the matter only last week. Of course, I shall be happy to check them again, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that when I last conversed with Mr. St. Clair he clearly believed that not only had he been left worse off and unable to purchase the house that he needed, but, without a shadow of a doubt, he was a loser in real terms from the changes brought in by the Government.

There is, of course, an added lesson to be learnt from that case: that any disabled person now about to claim for the first time will start at the new levels of benefit. Just how hard they will be hit is shown by the study produced by 15 citizens advice bureaux, based on 80 claimants who came to the bureaux for two days in early March. Forty-four of them will receive lower benefits under the new scheme if applying for the first time after 11 April.

Those who lose most are the old and the sick. That is not surprising, because a key feature of the new scheme is that it sweeps away all the extra additions for the special needs of the disabled and frail, such as diet, heating and laundry: all the additions to which a former Minister of State with responsibility for social security—now the Minister for Health—once referred in a television interview as the twiddly bits of the system. It is, of course, those "twiddly bits" that made life bearable for the disabled.

Of 20 pensioners in the study, 14 will be worse off under the new scheme. Of 19 disabled claimants, 16 will be worse off. Again, those are not estimates. They are not based on a computer model. They are actual assessments of real claimants who came to those bureaux only a month ago. They are deeply disturbing figures, and they are even more disturbing given that every year one third of the claimants who come on to the books of the social security system do so for the first time. In other words, next April one third of all claimants of income support will be assessed under the new rules, and if the experience of the citizens advice bureaux is any guide, more than half those new claimants will receive less under the new system than they would under the previous system, with all its faults.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): Will my hon. Friend bring to the Minister's attention the ending of the transitional protection arrangements that existed before the new schemes came in? One of my constituents, Mrs. Margaret Wells, is in a home for people suffering from senile dementia, and has only £400 in savings. However, she had to leave behind a terraced house that the DHSS estimates now to be worth more than £6,000. Her payments for her stay in the home are being cut off, and her relatives are being told that, because they cannot afford the extra £100 that they must find, they must borrow: they must go into debt to pay it. Is that the kind of thrift that the Prime Minister is advocating?

Mr Cook: A number of my colleagues have encountered identical cases, including my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster), two of whose constituents have lost £140 a week—money that they required to meet the fees of their accommodation in residential homes. I know that the Secretary of State has received a letter from the Association of Hospice Social Workers asking to take up that point with him. I hope that he will tell us that he will do the association the courtesy,

[Mr Cook]

and show the courage, of meeting its members and considering their objections to a rule that is causing so much harshness.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West) *rose*——

Mr. Cook: No, I shall not give way. Mr. Speaker has very properly advised the House that many hon. Members wish to speak. I should like to proceed with my speech.

There is common ground between the Government and the Opposition. Both sides accept that there are cash losers. Even the Prime Minister accepts that. Let us now consider who those losers are. Let us ask whether their losses are acceptable, even if they are only 12 per cent., or 960,000, a figure to which the Government admit. There can be few hon. Members who have visited their constituencies in the past fortnight who have not met some of those losers. Last weekend, in my constituency, I met a couple on invalidity benefit of £72 a week who have lost £11 a week in housing benefit—£44 a month. They have not £6,000 to their name. But 350,000 lose all their benefit and will experience an even worse impact on their living standards as a result of that rule.

Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition referred the House to the case of Mrs. Williams. Let me refer the House to the case of Mrs. Phillips of Crewe. Mrs. Phillips received £41 in state pension and £12 in interest per week—a grand sum of £53 weekly. She received the interest on a capital sum of £9,000. Because the sum is over £6,000, last week she lost all her housing benefit. That increased her rent and rates by £12 a week.

Until last week, after housing and fuel costs, Mrs. Phillips was left with £33 per week for food, clothing and every other necessity. She is now left with £23 a week for those expenses. How many Conservative Members imagine that they could manage on that income per week? I know that some of them have had the courage to admit that they could not. I know that because some of them have been confronted by constituents hit by the new rule. I read in the press that the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) has been advising those caught by the rule that they should put a deposit on their funeral with an undertaker in order to get below the £6,000 ceiling.

There is a much simpler and more effective way of solving the problem of the hon. Gentleman's constituents, and that is for him to use his vote in the House, to which his constituents sent him, to force the Government to change a rule that he will not defend.

Nor is it just those on housing benefit who lose. There are the 15,000 people who lose all social security because they or their partners work more than 24 hours a week. Among those 15,000 people are Mr. and Mrs. Godden, to whom I referred yesterday. Before I close, I wish to dwell on their case.

Mrs. Godden suffers from multiple sclerosis. That is a degenerative condition. It will get worse, not better. Already Mrs. Godden can barely walk the length of her house. She has three young daughters, the youngest of whom is two years old and the oldest is eight years old. She has a mentally handicapped son who stays in a hospital during the week and returns home at weekends. For such a household she needs constant attendance.

There is one solution—it is rapidly becoming the only solution available to the Goddens—and that is for Mr. Godden to give up his work and stay at home and for the family to live entirely on social security. Mr. Godden has chosen not to do that. To his credit, he has struggled to hold down his job—a job that involves him working six days a week from 9 am to 6 pm, for which he takes home £128 a week.

Mr. Godden is precisely the kind of person whom Conservative Members constantly tell us they want to support—people who choose to work for a low wage rather than go on the dole. It costs Mr. and Mrs. Godden £120 to secure constant attendance while Mr. Godden works. The net gain from Mr. Godden's work is £8. Under the old rules, the Goddens qualified for social security of £48 a week. Now they do not qualify for a penny.

There is another twist. The Secretary of State yesterday advised the House that their accommodation was rent-free. That is perfectly true. It is rent-free because it is tied accommodation. If Mr. Godden now gives up his job, as he may be obliged to do, the family will in turn be rendered homeless.

Mr. and Mrs. Godden came to Parliament before Easter. They spoke to a press conference of the parliamentary lobby in the Palace—possibly the most hardened and cynical audience known to man. Nevertheless, it was obvious that they were moved by Mr. and Mrs. Godden's plight. It is the mark of a civilised and decent society how it supports families in Mr. and Mrs. Godden's position; how it helps them to struggle to hold together their marriage and their children to prevent them from going into care. That is the nightmare that haunts Mrs. Godden, because, by a wicked irony, she herself was brought up in care.

I shall never forget the reception that her case received in the House yesterday. It was received on the Government Benches with laughter. What Conservative Members found funny was the Secretary of State's observation that the Goddens had been on holiday. They found it the biggest joke of the day that a disabled claimant had taken her children on holiday, as if people on benefit should be under a kind of house arrest.

Yes, all right, Mr. and Mrs. Godden had a holiday. It lasted six days and it ended 12 days ago. They went to Plymouth to see Mrs. Godden's relatives. Mr. Godden is a caravan salesman. His company gave him free use of a caravan for a week. They parked it in a farmer's field at a rent of £2 a night. That, and the petrol from Bristol, was the entire cost of the holiday that Conservative Members found so funny.

However, there is something that the Government have done to help the Goddens. It would be churlish of me not to refer to it before closing. As a result of the Budget, Mr. Godden's weekly net income has gone up to £130. He has gained £2 from tax cuts while losing £48 from benefit cuts.

Here we come to the final and shaming contrast—the contrast between tax cuts in March and benefit cuts in April. There need not have been any losers from the social security changes. We know that the Government had the money to prevent there being any losers. We know that because the Chancellor found £2,080 million to give to 750,000 top rate taxpayers only last month. There was no talk of targeting there in the Budget speech; no talk of concentrating help where it was most needed last month. The Chancellor actually gave away more money to 750,000 of the rich than the entire increase in the social

security budget for 12 million claimants. That tells us all that we need to know about the Government's priorities. This is a Government who help the rich and punish the poor, and it is against those priorities that we shall vote tonight.

4.26 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. Moore): It is extraordinary that the Opposition should call for an emergency debate—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Opposition spokesman was heard in silence and I hope that the House will give an equally fair hearing to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Moore: As I started to say, it is extraordinary that the Opposition should call for an emergency debate on the social security changes as though anything that occurred on Monday had not been discussed and debated repeatedly—I am talking, Mr. Speaker, to the Opposition —and in minute detail, over the past months, and, indeed, years. In fact, the changes had been under scrutiny, in the House and elsewhere, since the review process started back in 1983 and 1984.

For example, the Opposition will be aware that the Social Security Act 1986, which provided the legislative basis for the changes, was debated for over 234 hours—a similar length of time to that given to the equivalent legislation in the 1940s. In Committee, 162 hours were spent in 42 sessions considering 1,498 amendments. The changes—*[Interruption.]* There is time for me to make all the points that I am seeking to make. The changes were incorporated in the manifesto on which the Conservative party won the election. Finally, the detailed regulations for the new schemes and other changes this month were the subject of numerous further debates here and in another place.

Before I proceed—I shall endeavour to be as brief as I can in view of your comments, Mr. Speaker—I want to respond briefly to the detailed points on Mrs. Godden made by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). It is extremely difficult for those of us who are concerned about the genuine interests of benefit claimants, as I know the hon. Gentleman is, to seek to debate such matters across the Floor of the House. I sought yesterday, and I do so again now, to make certain that the facts were there —the facts that related to the inability of the local social services department and my Department to establish whether, on the Independent Living Fund or on additional facilities, the local social services could assist.

In the light of the hon. Gentleman's comments it might therefore be useful again to remind the House of the inaccuracies in the report in one of yesterday's newspapers. The mobility allowance—*[Interruption.]* It is useful for the House to know the facts if an individual case is being raised. Obviously we all welcome the fact that the family receives £23·05 a week in mobility allowance, which was not mentioned. The general increase in benefits this week brought the total benefit income up to £117·30 a week. There was an increase in the husband's wages to £130 a week and, as the hon. Member for Livingston rightly said, there is no liability to pay rent or rates. There was also no mention of the presence in the home of a non-dependent son who is in full-time work.

Together, those facts paint a different picture. After the changes this week, and prior to the application that will be considered under the independent living fund, Mrs. Godden has a weekly income of £247·70 for a family of five, with no rent or rates to pay, and a working son living at home. I am just reminding the House of the facts of the case.

We should put the changes this week into context. The hon. Member for Livingston failed to address the real problems of the old benefit system. Indeed, by every——

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): I am grateful, not only for the Secretary of State giving way, but for his attention to detail. Will he confirm that of the £247 of which he spoke £120 has to be spent because of the constant attendance requirements of Mrs. Godden? That is the price of a mother having multiple sclerosis. The effective income of the family is not, therefore, £247 a week, but £127 a week.

Mr. Moore: If we want to be even more accurate, the right hon. Gentleman is right in that particular, but his facts are incomplete. He is right to say that the private domestic help that Mrs. Godden is receiving is currently running at a cost of £125·38 a week. The local social services have visited her since I spoke yesterday and have offered—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State was asked a question and he is now seeking to reply to it.

Mr. Moore: The social services have offered assistance with domestic help, which has been refused.

The hon. Member for Livingston failed to address the real problems of the old benefits system. Indeed, by every comment and criticism that he makes of our changes, he implies that he would prefer to keep the old system in its old shape indefinitely into the future. If that is not his position, he holds out the absurd illusion that, in reforming a highly complex and frequently unbalanced structure into something more coherent and sensible, it is possible to leave everybody, even those who have benefited from the anomalies of the old system, just as well off as if the old system had been continued. Frankly, as all hon. Members know, that is a delusion.

What were the problems of the old structure of benefits? First—this is something on which many people of all political opinions will agree—the old structure was not sufficiently responsive to changes in society and to changing needs. The 1985 Green Paper, which launched the reform process, showed that there had been important changes in the characteristics of those in the lowest income groups over the previous decade or so. In particular, the growing prosperity of pensioners meant that there were far fewer of them in the lowest income group by the early 1980s than there had been 10 years previously. Indeed, on average, pensioners' net incomes rose by 18 per cent. in real terms. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): We cannot hear the Secretary of State.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the House is silent, hon. Members will be able to hear the Secretary of State.

Mr. Moore: Indeed, on average, pensioners' net incomes rose by 18 per cent. in real terms between 1979 and 1985; twice as fast as in the population as a whole, and very much faster than in the mid-1970s.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) *rose*——

Mr. Moore: By contrast, the Green Paper showed an increase in the number of families, with children, on relatively low incomes and concluded that the social security system needed to be more responsive to their particular needs.

Mr. Winnick *rose*——

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead) *rose*——

Mr. Moore: I should like to get further into my speech.

Secondly, the old structure tended to lock recipients into dependency rather than to liberate them from it. Too many people were in a position in which, if they sought to improve their position or that of their families, they could find themselves worse off as a result.

The absurdity of that situation can be shown in the case of a married couple, with three children aged three, eight and 11, paying average local authority rent and rates. Under the old structure, on gross earnings of £70 a week, they would have had, including benefits, a total net income of £111·80. However, if their gross earnings more than doubled, to £150, they would have been over £1 a week worse off. That was not only a ludicrous situation, but was deeply immoral. The system said, "If you want to better yourself, look to the state for help and not to your own efforts."

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East) *rose*——

Mr. Moore: In addition to the complexities within each benefit, there was no real coherence between them, so that supplementary benefit and housing benefit— *[Interruption.]* I am trying to illustrate the kinds of complexities and problems that existed in the past in a way that I think most people would appreciate hearing. There was no real coherence between them, so that supplementary benefit, housing benefit and family income supplement each had its own rules and its own fine print to cover what were often much the same issues. It was a recipe for complexity, confusion and anomaly and it was emphatically not a satisfactory basis for the future.

The need for reform was therefore clear. Huge resources were going into social security. In 1978-79, about £16 billion was spent on benefits, and in the last financial year that had reached over £44 billion. Even after discounting inflation, there had been a real terms increase approaching 40 per cent., or over £12 billion, at current prices, but despite that record expenditure, the system was clearly not working. The reforms introduced this month are designed to tackle those very real and pressing problems.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Winnick *rose*——

Mr. Moore: All three income-related benefits are now far more closely aligned, achieving greater coherence between the help available to those on low incomes, whether in work or out of work, improving work incentives——

Mr. Winnick *rose*——

Mr. Moore: —and achieving a simpler and more straightforward structure.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I say to those hon. Members who are now seeking to interrupt that it takes time out of the debate and also takes time away from those who may wish later to make contributions.

Mr. Moore: The new structure will make it easier for claimants to understand what is available and what they should receive. Equally important, it makes it possible to ensure that resources are directed to the priority groups which need them most. For example, we are using this new flexibility to give particular emphasis to the needs of families with children.

So far, I have spoken mainly——

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Moore: —about regular weekly benefits, but the system of one-off payments for exceptional needs was also included in the reform. The single payments scheme no longer achieved its aim——

Mr. Nellist: What is the Secretary of State scared of?

Mr. Moore: —nor did it direct taxpayers' money to those who needed it most. In particular, it was no longer a system of exceptional payments. In 1949, exceptional needs payments——

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is one of those who have told me that they wish to take part in the debate. He cannot expect to intervene and also to make a speech.

Mr. Moore: As I was saying, it was no longer a system of exceptional payments. In 1949, exceptional needs payments were made at the rate of one for every 10 people on benefit. By 1979, that had become one for every three. Since 1980, the cost had been doubling every two years.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Moore: The facts in relation to the appalling old system are relevant.

That was out of all proportion to the increase in the number of people on benefit. In place of single payments, we have therefore introduced the social fund. As the hon. Member for Livingston rightly said, this has attracted a great deal of comment, but let us keep it in perspective. Single payments represented a tiny proportion of the total expenditure on social security and the budget for the social fund will be at about the same level as the cost of those payments in the last financial year.

Mr. Nellist: Give way.

Mr. Moore: Rightly, in my view, the vast bulk of social security goes on regular weekly benefits.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must tell the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) for the last time that he must not persist in rising if the Minister does not give way.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is no challenge to that.

Mr. Nellist: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East is not trying to ask his question through the Chair, which would be an unfair tactic.

Mr. Nellist: Not at all, Mr. Speaker. My point of order is that if I rise every minute or every two minutes to ask the Secretary of State to give way, that is my perfect right as a Member of Parliament to try to put my point of view. This is the only chance that I get to ask the Secretary of State questions.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has a right, but equally he is aware of the rules. If the Minister does not give way, or indeed if the hon. Gentleman is speaking and does not give way, another hon. Member seeking to intervene must not persist.

Mr. Moore: I want to consider the effects of the changes —this was the gravamen of the argument presented by the hon. Member for Livingston—on the incomes of claimants. Many scare stories have been thrown around on those effects and I want to clarify the position.

I want, first, to refer briefly to the point raised by the hon. Member for Livingston when he referred to the Policy Studies Institute, the Oxford study, the Wandsworth study and others. One of the problems with most of those studies, as opposed to the Government's data, is that they—the PSI study is an example—underplay the spending on transitional protection.

Mr. Nellist: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Moore: All the studies to which the hon. Member for Livingston referred—*[Interruption.]* I am trying to respond to the precise questions raised by the hon. Member for Livingston. All the studies in question made misleading comparisons by quoting average single payments figures for all income support families with children in the way in which the PSI did. They also misleadingly estimated single payments figures which predate the necessary changes made in 1986 and 1987.

Perhaps I should now repeat the basic point that we cannot move away from an old, complex, unbalanced and ultimately unsatisfactory system to something——

Mr. Winnick: Give way.

Mr. Moore: —fairer and more equitable without in the process having both gainers and losers, and in that respect I recognise the point made by the hon. Member for Livingston.

What are the effects? I believe that the Government have been completely frank and open about the likely impact of the changes and we published detailed tables, based on the best available data, in 1985 and last October. We have shown the results in structural terms and in terms of the cash position of those on benefits at the time of change. I want to explain that distinction, because I accept entirely what the hon. Member for Livingston said when he claimed that this was a very important point.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Moore: I am trying as courteously as I can to respond to the basic points made by the shadow Social Services spokesman.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a very brief debate. In fairness to the whole House, I ask the House——

Mr. Nellist: I asked the Secretary State to give way first.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) rises again and the Minister does not give way, I will have to ask him to leave the Chamber.

Mr. Moore: I am trying to address the very precise and important points made by the hon. Member for Livingston.

The structural tables describe an essentially hypothetical position, as they compare the position of recipients as they will be this year with the position that they would have been in had the old system of weekly benefits continued completely unchanged, but uprated on 11 April in line with inflation.

The tables are also hypothetical in the sense that they compare weekly benefit entitlement under the old scheme, had it continued, with the new scheme, but without taking account of the transitional protection which many beneficiaries will receive on top of their actual entitlement under the new schemes. I accept that that is an unavoidable difficulty with such tables, but it is important for anyone making serious comparisons or looking at the issue seriously to bear that point in mind. It means that, if used in isolation, the structural tables understate the true level of resources that the Government are committing to income-related benefits at the point of change.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Moore: The cash tables, which we have also published, give a clearer picture of the actual situation which real benefit—*[Interruption.]* I shall come in a moment to the precise figures which the hon. Member for Livingston rightly asked me to mention. The cash tables show the actual situation which real benefit recipients will experience this month.

The tables show the numbers who see an increase, decrease or no change in their weekly income at the time of transition, taking account of the changes in rules and benefit rates and the transitional cash protection that we are providing for those in the most vulnerable position —those on income support who would otherwise be worse off.

I expect that some of the confusion arises from a misunderstanding of the fact that, as the hon. Member for Livingston said, last October we published figures on both those bases. For instance, some have claimed to see an inconsistency between the Government's figures and those of the Social Security Advisory Committee. There is no discrepancy for, as the hon. Member for Livingston rightly said, the committee was simply quoting from the Government's structural tables.

The hon. Member for Livingston claimed yesterday that the SSAC figures were new. We are discussing the very points raised by the hon. Member for Livingston yesterday. He cited the fact that the figures were new, in order to justify today's emergency debate. In doing so, I believe that he has shown once again that he does not read what the Government publish and that he has not taken in the figures placed in the Library——

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Hon. Members: Name him.

Mr. Speaker: I must now ask the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East to leave the Chamber.

Mr. Nellist: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is no point of order arising from this. Will the hon. Gentleman please leave the Chamber? If he does not leave the Chamber, I shall be forced to name him, and that takes time out of the debate.

Mr. Nellist: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: There is no point of order. The hon. Gentleman should leave the Chamber.

Mr. John Hughes (Coventry, North-East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I give the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East one more chance. Will he now leave the Chamber?

Mr. John Hughes: Will you answer a point of order, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I name Mr. Dave Nellist.

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): Tory stooge.

Motion made, and Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 43 (Order in debate),

That Mr. Dave Nellist be suspended from the service of the House.—[Mr. Waddington.]

The House proceeded to a Division——

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester) *(seated and covered)*: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. At the point when this Division was called and in the seconds thereafter the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) was distinctly heard to refer to you as a Tory stooge. In so doing he gave great offence not only to the House but to yourself. I think that this is an appropriate point at which to raise this matter and insist that some action be taken about it as soon as the Division is over.

Mr. Speaker: In the noise that ensued after I had named the hon. Member, I heard no allegation of that kind.

Hon. Members: Oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that the whole House will always support its Speaker when he has to do his duty, however painful and difficult.

The House having divided: Ayes 270, Noes 32.

Division No. 253] **[4.47 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blair, Tony
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyes, Roland
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cunningham, Dr John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dewar, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Derek
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Galbraith, Sam
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Robert
Macdonald, Calum A.
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
O'Brien, William
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael

Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Radice, Giles
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robertson, George
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rooker, Jeff
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stokes, John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wallace, James
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Warren, Kenneth
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alan Howarth and
Mr. Stephen Dorrell.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Clay, Bob
Cohen, Harry
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Heffer, Eric S.
Hinchliffe, David
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Loyden, Eddie
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Morley, Elliott
Nellist, Dave
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Redmond, Martin
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Skinner, Dennis
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Hughes and
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

That Mr. Dave Nellist be suspended from the service of the House.

Mr. Speaker *then directed the hon. Member to withdraw from the House.*

Mr. Nellist: I shall be back.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East kindly withdraw?

The hon. Member then withdrew.

Mr. Speaker: The interruption has taken time out of a Standing Order No. 20 debate that I granted yesterday, of great interest to the whole House. I ask the House now to allow the debate to proceed in good order so that as many hon. Members as possible may participate.

Mr. Lawrence: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Your kindness and generosity are well known, but the fact is that the whole House heard the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) call you a "Tory stooge". He did not do it once or twice accidentally. He made absolutely sure that everybody in the House heard that attack, not only on you, but on the great office that you hold. It was a deliberate attempt to undermine your authority and must be looked upon with disgust by all hon. Members, from whichever party they come.

Mr. Speaker: I did not hear that comment. The mere fact that we are having a Standing Order No. 20 debate clearly refutes what the hon. Gentleman is alleged to have said.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire) *rose*——

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is an opportunity for the House to obtain information from the Secretary of State for Social Services on a matter which is of great interest to the House and the country. I did not hear the comment and do not propose to take any further points of order on it. Mr. Moore.

Mr. Moore: So far as the results of the estimates published by the Government are concerned, there is no secret that both sets of tables show that some are now better off, some in much the same position and some less well off following the changes. Overall, the results show that around 77 per cent. of couples with children, 60 per cent. of lone parents, and 81 per cent. of sick and disabled people are unaffected or are better off in structural terms as a result of the reforms. These are valuable improvements which will be widely welcomed. Overall, around three fifths, or 57 per cent., will be better off, or in the same position, simply on this structural——

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I hesitate to interrupt, because I very much want to hear what the right hon. Gentleman is saying, but even those of us who have good and sharp hearing cannot hear what he is saying because he is speaking too quietly. Will he please be kind enough to speak up?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I understand that the Secretary of State has an infection. I have done my best to help by having the microphones turned up to the fullest extent. If the House listens in silence to what the right hon. Gentleman has to say, that will be greatly to the benefit of the House and will assist the Secretary of State.

Mr. Moore: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Overall, around three fifths, or 57 per cent., will be better off or in the same position, simply on this structural comparison, ignoring the effects of the transitional protection. That was the point that the hon. Member for Livingston rightly addressed.

Turning to the actual cash position, which real people actually experience this month, the published tables show that about 92 per cent. of couples with children, 89 per cent of lone parents, 87 per cent of pensioners and no less than 98 per cent. of sick and disabled people are either better off or no worse off in cash terms. In total, 88 per cent. of those receiving income-related benefits are in that position. Of course I recognise that hon. Members are concerned about

[Mr. Moore]

individual cases and about those who may be less well off, but I hope that the figures help to put their position into context.

Before leaving this general area, let me say a few words about one particular change which I know has caused some concern to some of my hon. Friends—the change in the treatment of capital.

Let me emphasise that one of our prime aims is to focus help on those groups most in need. Until last week, one could be in receipt of housing benefit with £25,000 sitting in a current account. That simply did not make sense. It is entirely reasonable to ask people with substantial resources of their own to use such resources before turning to help from public funds. In comparison to the old system——

Mrs. Mahon *rose*——

Mr. Moore: Perhaps I could explain the point about housing benefit. In comparison to the old system, the new rule is in fact very beneficial to those most in need and to those with small savings. Hitherto, those in greatest need were ineligible for any help through supplementary benefit if they had only £3,000 in capital. That limit is now doubled to £6,000. In housing benefit—like income support and family credit—we will now be completely ignoring the first £3,000 of capital—again benefiting those with only modest resources.

We have felt it both right and fair to expect those with more significant resources, particularly over £6,000, to look to those resources in the first place rather than to taxpayers, some of whom——

Mrs. Mahon *rose*——

Mr. Moore: If I can complete the whole point, I shall be happy to give way to the hon. Lady.

We have felt it both right and fair to expect those with more significant resources, particularly over £6,000, to look to those resources in the first place rather than to taxpayers, some of whom may have fewer resources than themselves, for extra help. Let us be perfectly clear. Housing benefit, like all the income-related benefits, is for people who have little money of their own. That means testing both what they earn and what they own by way of capital. The only difference between housing benefit and income support is that one is for housing costs, the other for living costs in general. They are both paid for by taxpayers. Recognising the similarity between the two benefits, we now have the same test of capital for all the income-related benefits.

Some of my hon. Friends want to see a higher capital limit, but do they really believe that we should pay basic maintenance benefits to people with, for example, £10,000 in the bank? After all, one purpose of saving and thrift is to enable one to look after one's own needs rather than depend on other taxpayers. We have therefore struck a careful balance between the need to ensure that money goes only to those who really need it, and the need not to penalise thrift. It is, incidentally, ridiculous for the Opposition to talk about this Government penalising thrift. Under the last Labour Administration, pensioners saw the value of their savings destroyed through inflation. Pensioners' income from savings fell in value by 16 per cent. under Labour, but increased in value by 52 per cent. in our first six years alone. I happily give way to the hon. Lady.

Mrs. Mahon: May I draw the Secretary of State's attention to a case that was brought to me this morning? *[Interruption.]* The point that I want to raise relates to the £6,000 cut-off limit.

The case relates to a woman in my constituency whose house is up for sale. She is 59 years old and draws £35 per week supplementary benefit. She has lost the whole of her benefit because she is deemed to have a capital asset. The house has been valued at £14,000. She has been trying to sell it for 12 months, but cannot. Will the Secretary of State tell us what transitional arrangements have been made for Mrs. Richardson and the two other people who contacted me this morning, one of whom has threatened suicide?

Mr. Moore: She can, of course——

Mrs. Mahon: She cannot get a loan.

Mr. Moore: Obviously, I shall ask my hon. Friends to look at the detail. She can, of course, obtain a commercial loan with regard to the sale.

Mrs. Mahon: She cannot make the repayments.

Mr. Moore: There is difficulty in trying to answer any individual case, but the fact is that a person could, in general, take a loan on the capital value whether or not she has income—*[Interruption.]* I will obviously, as the hon. Lady——

Mrs. Mahon: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot see how a point of order arises.

Mrs. Mahon *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I advise the hon. Lady that she is doing her colleagues a grave disservice because she, too, wrote to ask if she could participate in the debate.

Mrs. Mahon *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: If it is a point of order that I can answer, I shall have to take it. I hope that it is.

Mrs. Mahon: I believe that the Secretary of State is deliberately misleading the House—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady may not have been here very long, but she must know that that comment must be withdrawn immediately.

Mrs. Mahon: I am sorry if I was accidentally insulting the Secretary of State, but what he said was not true.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady may have disagreed, but will she please withdraw the words, "deliberately misleading"?

Mrs. Mahon: Yes, of course. I do so quite willingly. But I have a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My point is that people without income cannot get loans. I do not think that the Secretary of State understands that.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order for me.

Mr. Moore: I was trying to make the general point that is applicable in this kind of case, but I cannot comment on

the individual case. If an asset is up for sale, it is possible to have a collateralised loan on it. I shall not pursue the point, but I ask the hon. Lady to let my junior Ministers have the details and we will pursue it.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): While no one would expect that someone with £25,000 in the bank, as my right hon. Friend has suggested, should be given help, the aspect of targeting, which is part of what has happened, shows that there may be a problem at the £6,000 level. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the level need not be immutable but could be adjusted at any time that the Government wished?

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend is right about the statutory position.

There is one final misconception. The reforms are not about cuts. Quite the contrary: social security spending is already at record levels—far higher in real terms than under Labour. And we will be spending an extra £2 billion this year compared to last, taking the benefit budget to £46 billion, or around a third of total taxpayer expenditure. Even after allowing for the effects of the annual uprating of benefits, we are spending more on social security this year than last.

I recognise that no major change, even to a system as badly in need of reform as this one, can be easy or wholly painless, but the difficulties in making the actual transition cannot be allowed to preserve an unsatisfactory system for ever. This Government—unlike their predecessors—have had the courage to tackle the real and fundamental problems with the old structure. We have produced a benefits system which is simpler, better targeted on priority groups and which enhances rather than obstructs individual responsibility and choice. It is a charter for self-respect and directs more help to those who need it most. It is the right approach.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. In view of the time which has been lost in the debate, I again make an appeal for brief contributions.

5.12 pm

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): The social security shambles over which the Secretary of State presides may or may not provide the political banana skin on which the Government will slide, but it has certainly put the skids under the Secretary of State personally. No one could have listened to his speech without realising the discomfiture behind it. As the House well knows, the reason is that the Government forecast, that there are only 12 per cent. losers, defies the experience of hon. Members in their constituencies in every part of the country. Everyone knows that there has been a serious miscalculation.

On housing benefit, there is a general feeling that because rents are so different throughout the country it is appropriate that there should be a different capital limit and that £6,000 is much too low. There is no sign that the Government are prepared to think again on that. Apart from that, we have concrete evidence that the impact is extremely harsh on people where there is no question of cash but only an income assessment. An elderly widow on retirement pension, who is receiving her husband's Civil Service pension, was getting £54·30 a week. Her housing benefit was £28·25 per week. That has been cut to £17·04, leaving her to pay £22·72. She has to manage on £31·58.

Innumerable nasties have suddenly appeared. It is all very well for the Secretary of State to talk about the hours of debate, but how many people have realised that prior to 11 April there was discretion to disregard totally a war pension when assessing a client's need but that it is now statutory that only £5 is disregarded? Citizens advice bureaux are reporting to us that this can mean the loss of up to £30 per week, although the average loss is about £10.

Wherever we look, we find hardship. The debate is about whether the Secretary of State and the Government are prepared to indicate that they will use the power of regulation and of advice to social security offices to introduce an element of discretion to alleviate the harshness of the impact on individual families. We have not had one sign that the Government are prepared to think again. If it transpires, as is widely felt, that there has been a serious underestimate of the number of losers and that the heart-rending cases which are coming up in constituency after constituency are real, will the Secretary of State follow the example of the Minister of State in relation to the disabled? The Minister of State discovered that some people would be really hard hit, and he introduced a fund. We may argue about the fund but at least there was an alleviation and a genuine attempt to deal with the problems of the disabled.

I am glad to see the former Secretary of State for Social Services on the Front Bench. It is widely reported that he anticipated the problem with the capital amount and asked for a £10,000 capital amount. It is widely reported that the amount of the grant that the Government's advisory committee wanted was four times as much.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Norman Fowler): The right hon. Gentleman has mentioned me. He talks about what has been widely reported. His statement is inaccurate. My view on the £6,000 capital limit was set out in the Green Paper. That capital limit applies not just to housing benefit, but, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has just made clear, to supplementary benefit and to income support as well. If the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) feels so strongly about that, perhaps he will explain why the Government of which he was a member did nothing to extend the capital rule and had a wicked cut-off at £1,200, with a total cliff-edge effect.

Dr. Owen: I was giving the right hon. Gentleman more credit than appears to be due to him. Of course, *The Independent* in its editorial also gave credit to him, and it will no doubt wish to change its view. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] If the right hon. Gentleman says that in Cabinet he argued for a £6,000 limit, I accept that. But the basic point is still the same. That is an inadequate limit. The hardship that is being imposed on the housing account is considerable. The example which I gave represents a case which has nothing to do with capital, and I could cite other examples.

Mr. Fowler *rose*——

Dr. Owen: I will not give way again.

What about the social fund? We now hear from Islington borough that it is being recalculated. In 1986-87, Islington borough was paying out about £4·5 million in

[Dr. Owen]

single payments. The same offices in Islington have been given for social fund grants for 1988-89 a miserly £811,351—more than an 80 per cent. cut. Why? Because for the 32 weeks which were the basis for the calculation of the assessment, there was a shortage of staff and problems in the social security offices which were therefore paying out much less in discretionary grants. That is another indication of the arbitrary way in which the social fund has been calculated. Clearly a mistake has been made in Islington. It will have to be rectified and that will call in question the cash limits on the social fund.

Again, we ask the Government to indicate that they are prepared to use the contingency fund of £5 billion to make an alleviation on the social fund. People have repeatedly warned the Government throughout the hours of discussion that the cash limit on the social fund is grossly unfair and that there must be an alleviation. It is an unrealistic cash limit and it will have to be changed. Again, there must be flexibility.

There should also be flexibility in community care grants. They comprise the one element in respect of which people do not have to repay the grant that they are getting. There is an exceptional provision. It relates to the social fund guidance that goes to social security offices. Again, will it be possible to look at the guidance that goes to social security offices? When faced by such clearly exceptional cases, will they be able to use the community care grant rather wider than just to prevent people going into institutional care to alleviate their financial circumstances? Otherwise, there will be no way of helping such people.

Again, citizens advice bureaux record the fact that no charitable funds are available to alleviate hardship in individual cases. The debate—this is why, presumably, in your wisdom, Mr. Speaker, you chose to give the House this debate so urgently—is about the possibility of making regulations and introducing changes in the advice to social security offices that will alter the situation. That is what we urge. That is why the indignation that has been expressed needs to be taken seriously by the Government. They can tough it out; they can ignore it and say that it is a U-turn.

In fairness, parts of the legislation are welcome and long overdue, particularly on the unemployment trap, which has been overcome, and the new credit for families. But, because the restructuring of the legislation was unable to inject extra money to float off anomalies and hardship, the legislation, the Government and the Secretary of State are in danger of being discredited. We do not worry about their reputations, but we worry about individual cases. On their behalf, there is a wish in the House that the Government should think again.

5.21 pm

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): The debate has been mounted by the Opposition as an opportunity to criticise the Government for introducing changes to the social security system. We should take this opportunity to give credit to my right hon. and hon. Friends for tackling the social security confusion that has existed for so long. I include my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment and my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, both of whom did a great deal of groundwork on the matter.

Surely there is no dispute in the House that, as it existed, the previous system was almost impossible for claimants to understand. It was complex, difficult to administer, and uneven in its effect. It bristled with anomalies. We have heard how people were getting housing benefit, despite having substantial capital. It had reached the point at which one in three households was drawing housing benefit. There were cases in which people on supplementary benefit were better off than those who were receiving low wages. Of course, if they had got a job, they would have lost such benefits. That was a disincentive to try to find a job. There have been cases of families claiming single payments for items for which other families on modest incomes had to pay and budget for. That was expenditure not of Government money but of taxpayers' money. Taxpayers' money—often from people on small incomes—was deliberately redistributed.

The Government were right to review and to recast the system. It is now simpler, easier to administer and understand, and it is constructed to direct help where it is most needed. It is aimed especially at poorer families with children.

I confess that I am at a loss to understand how a system with such qualities can be described as wicked, iniquitous or unchristian by certain bishops who do not appear to have studied the details of the schemes. Of course, the problem is that, in order to administer any system of this sort, we need regulations and guidelines that are necessarily drawn up by civil servants and approved by Parliament to seek to cover every situation and every possible combination of circumstances.

Because human beings' situations differ, anomalies and omissions may appear as the scheme operates. If that is so, I am quite sure that Ministers will learn from experience. If there is a case for changes on the margins, Ministers will not be dilatory in making them. If such changes involve regulations requiring parliamentary approval, so be it.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) *rose*——

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford) *rose*——

Mr. Sims: Bearing in mind what Mr. Speaker has said, I prefer to keep my remarks as brief as possible and to give hon. Members an opportunity to speak later.

One of the best features of the new system is the social fund. Instead of making single payments according to a rigid formula, it treats each case on its merits. That makes a great deal of sense. One of the many misrepresentations that we have heard from the Opposition is the suggestion that only loans will come from the social fund. It has been made perfectly clear that certain people will qualify for outright grants.

There has been much talk about winners and losers. Of course, if we recast a system, unless the previous system was absolutely faultless—it clearly was not—it is inevitable and indeed right that there will be losers and winners. We have heard what the figures are. Fewer than 1 million people will receive less, the circumstances of about 2 million people will be unchanged, and over 5 million people will be gainers, and gainers of some substance. Yesterday, in reply to a question from me, my right hon. Friend told me that 40 per cent. of gainers will be better off to the extent of £3 a week or more.

There is a philosophical divide. We know that the Labour party favours the mass redistribution of wealth, with benefits being given to all and sundry, regardless of

their means or needs. At the other end of the political spectrum, the old-time Liberals would have endorsed a laissez-faire policy and said that no payment should be made to anybody. We have yet to learn the present Liberal party policy, whatever name it may come under. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I believe that the state should give help, but that it should be directed where it is needed and that it should not be on such a generous scale that people——

Ms. Ruddock *rose——*

Mr. Sims: I shall not give way. If the hon. Lady does not mind, I wish to keep my remarks brief.

Help should not be on such a generous scale that recipients make no effort to provide for themselves. There is a real dilemma. Where do we draw the line?

That dilemma is vividly illustrated by the housing benefit controversy. Clearly, someone on a small income and with little or no capital will need and should receive housing help. Similarly, somebody with tens of thousands of pounds is well able to provide for himself. But people who have been putting money aside have done so for their old age. Should they be penalised by not getting benefit because they have put money aside, particularly when they see their neighbours, who have spent money on the good things of life, now qualifying for benefit?

Where do we draw the line? Of course, there is no right answer. Wherever we draw the line, it will be argued that people will be discouraged from being prudent and that, if they are above the line, they will realise that they can spend a little more freely so that they go below the line and enjoy benefit.

With housing benefit and other forms of social security there will always be bad borderline cases. It is right that hon. Members and others should draw attention to them. But it is not right that politicians should use half-truths, distortions and downright misrepresentations to whip up a campaign purely for party advantage, incidentally causing a great deal of unnecessary concern to individuals. The Labour party's campaign does its members no credit. This reform of the social security system will be looked upon as one of the Government's great achievements.

5.29 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I wish to make one comment about the previous contribution, as I greatly respect the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims). I think that it is probably fair to say that I agree with the content of his speech about as much as he really does, even though he did a reasonable job of trying to defend the Government's record.

I take issue with the remarks of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) who, for once, decided to paint a very small picture on the political canvas. He was partially right that this debate is about trying to get the Government to give way and to make some concessions, although, had he taken even more time in his contribution, he might have answered his own question and said that we have very little chance of getting the Government to do that.

To me, this debate represents a watershed in a number of respects. This is the first debate in which I have participated in the House in which the issue of the poor has been of concern to a large number of hon. Members rather than to a few. Yet had we been holding this debate even only a few decades ago, we should have done so against the background of a link between the interests of the poor and the working class. One of the major factors that we have to take on board as a parliamentary democracy is the problem of how to represent the minority interests of the poor, which are clearly different from the interests of many working-class people.

Hon. Members will know that I probably owe my seat to my work for a pressure group representing the interests of poor families. Even with that background, however, I find it difficult to make the leap of imagination required of all of us when we are debating such matters and to contemplate what it is like having to live on the kind of income that will result from the reforms that the Government are introducing this week.

Let me give a couple of examples. For those under the age of 18, we are talking about £2·77 a day for everything other than rent. For those aged 18 to 24, we are talking about £3·67 a day, for a married couple—for each individual—from which they must cover all their needs, including the famous holiday that we have heard about, of £3·76. I point the finger not just at Conservative Members, but at myself. It is extremely difficult to contemplate what it is like to experience that standard of living. Yet in this debate we are talking about cutting, not increasing, the number of pennies that people have.

Secondly, this debate represents a watershed because of the feeling that is emerging on the Conservative Benches. I think it was Oscar Wilde—if it was not, I am sure that he would have thought of doing so—who referred to the love that dare not speak its name. There is also on the Tory Benches an unease that dare not voice itself publicly. It is an unease that is founded not just on the fear of lost votes, because many hon. Members have probably rightly reached the conclusion that those who do not like Tory policies have long since ceased voting for the Tory party; it is an unease not just about our stick and carrot society, in which a huge carrot and a massively large stick are used to try to create incentives, although Conservative Members quietly express their concern about that; and it is an unease that stems not just from the fear of disorder on our streets, because Conservative Members know that the riot has been privatised—people go about in ones and twos to do their mugging and robbing—and that we shall not suffer the disorders of the 1930s. It is not even to do with the way in which the Prime Minister bangs on and on —I feel that if I hear any more I shall suffer permanent brain damage—or about her trickle-down theory; and it is some trickle for the constituents whom we are discussing today.

Conservative Members' unease lies not only in all those things, but in something more. Even in Tory seats, and more so in Labour seats, whole ghettoes are appearing. Visiting them is like travelling back in a time machine and getting out 25 years ago. I see sights in my constituency that I have not seen in London since I was a boy. I see pinched faces, shuffling feet and ill-fitting clothes, which are all the signs of poverty. It is from those people that we are taking money.

That is part of Conservative Members' unease, because many of them react to those sights as we do. They feel a deep unease, either from a secular point of view—they experience a gut reaction that it is not right for a society to be generating such wealth and, cheek by jowl with it, such poverty—or from the straight Christian point of view that each of us is an equally important part of the creation and

[Mr. Frank Field]

that we should not be denying a large part of our population, albeit a minority, a share in the living standards that most of us can enjoy.

Thirdly, this debate represents a watershed because of the challenge that it poses to the Opposition, in addition to the challenge to Conservative Members to voice their unease. In her letter to the Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister chided him for always criticising the Government. That is amazing coming from someone who is so interested in how public money is spent, because the Leader of the Opposition is paid to oppose the Government. That is our job. Imagine what the response would be today if we were not doing our constitutional duty of opposing the Government. That is why I think that we shall carry the debate—in argument, if not in votes—later tonight.

However, if we are to follow up this immediate challenge, we need a vision of the sort of society that we are trying to create. We cannot get down to the fundamental job of recasting the welfare state, the tax system or any other aspect of home policy, unless we know the sort of society in which we wish to live. When we have that map and compass, we can get on with the task and with the second stage of opposition, which involves holding up an alternative vision to replacing rich ghettoes for the majority and increasing pauperisation for a large minority of our citizens.

While that task is underway, we are perfectly in order to carry out our duty by drawing the attention of the House and the country to social security reforms that take money away from people who are asked to live on £2.77 a day, £3.67 a day or, for the ultra-rich among the poor, £3.76 a day. That is what this debate is partly about, but I hope that I have convinced the right hon. Member for Devonport, at least, that it represents a watershed in many other ways as well.

5.38 pm

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) will be aware that I have, indeed, expressed some unease over the past few days about some aspects of the social security changes. I propose to repeat some of those expressions of unease this evening. I hope that my colleagues on both the Back and the Front Benches will concede that, in my case, we are not talking about the expression of an unease that has suddenly come upon me. It is something to which I have drawn the attention of successive Ministers at the Department of Health and Social Security, and proof of my concern is evident throughout the pages of *Hansard* from 1986 to the present.

Before I express my unease, I feel that it would be wrong not to say at the outset that there is much in the reforms that I warmly commend. The Secretary of State was absolutely right to say that the old system was imperfect and full of loopholes and anomalies. There was no more fervent supporter than myself of a move to change that, and to introduce a system which, through such devices as income support and family credit, came closer to targeting those in the greatest need and paying benefits accordingly. I repeat unashamedly that much of what the Government have done is a move in the right direction. Therefore, it is a pity that some aspects of the housing benefit changes, upon which I shall concentrate, seem to be far too harsh and will hurt people because of the sharp reduction in the standard of living that they impose.

It is central to my argument not that we should ignore the existence of capital, but that the steepness with which we move into and out of entitlement to housing benefit has not been given sufficient attention by the Government. I could say much about housing benefits relating to single people under 25, but I hope that the House will forgive me if I devote the rest of my speech to pensioners. Whether we think that the percentage of losers is 12 per cent. or 43 per cent., no one has sought to deny that a sizeable proportion of the losers will be pensioners whose standard of living will undoubtedly fall as a result of the imposition of these requirements.

In essence, the existence of only two tapers by which housing benefit are reduced on £3,000 capital and eliminated on £6,000 capital is a wholly insufficient way of dealing with an undoubted problem. To reduce housing benefit on savings of £3,000 and to eliminate it on £6,000 is to fail to appreciate the psychology of the generation with which we are dealing. From my experience, that generation sees thrift not just as a practical matter but as something approaching a moral duty. In real terms, £6,000 is a very small nest egg in 1988.

Ministers are wrong to suggest that people accumulate savings so that they can use them as a necessary contribution to a basic standard of living. Elderly people accumulate savings so that they can afford a few luxuries in their later years. By and large, they do not touch the capital because it brings them reassurance and they can rely on the income from those savings. That is why the capital cut-off is so unfair.

I do not disagree in essence with a capital cut-off, because I concede immediately that there must be one. A person receiving old-age pension and a sizeable occupational pension but without savings of any sort is dealt with gently, and many such people will continue to receive housing benefit. However, a pensioner on the old-age pension only and £6,000 in savings is penalised. It is little wonder that such people feel that thrift is being discouraged. The only conclusion that they can reach is that the Government expect such pensioners to use the capital that they have accumulated with great pain and over a long time in order to save the Government money. That cannot be right.

I repeat that there must be a cut-off point. No one would suggest that people with sizeable deposits in a building society—a figure of £25,000 was mentioned—should continue to receive housing benefit. As I have said, the steepness of the cut-off is far too high. For the life of me I cannot see why the Government have concluded that £6,000 is the right figure for an individual and also the right figure for a couple. The Government should say that, although the figure may have to remain at £6,000 for an individual, they will move to £10,000 perhaps for a couple and that the figures should at least be linked to the retail prices index so that we know that they will not remain static. I remind the House that the figure has remained static since the Fowler review of 1985. For that reason alone, there is an argument for saying that the figure should be increased.

I have no doubt that it is very desirable to release people from what the Government choose to call dependence. However, independence will get a bad name if release is

too swift and too harsh. I repeat my call for more than two tapers. That is a simple request and one that I have made during all the developments since the Fowler review. I know that there is no virtue in consistency in politics, but I have been repeating this point for three years. I hope that my colleagues, who may by this time be a little bored listening to it, will forgive me if I repeat it. Many of my hon. Friends share my views and have expressed them to me in private. I hope that sometimes some of them will be a little more vocal in their expressions of discontent.

I recognise that my speech is not calculated to bring the greatest comfort to the Government. I know that what I say is demonstrated by the cases that I have heard in my constituency surgery and by the letters that I have received. I remind Ministers that I should be astonished in the extreme if many of the people who have made these representations did not vote for me in June of last year. There is a political and humanitarian dimension. I know the Minister well and have a great regard for him. I hope that he will take these points on board and recognise that there is real concern, and that, if it cannot be eliminated, it can at least be decreased by a relatively small movement by the Government. Sooner or later the pressure will be such that the Minister will have to concede. Dare I hope that he will start to do so now?

5.47 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): I never thought that I would see a Government attack our poor people. During my 12 years in local government I never thought that I would see a Government concentrate such a vicious assault on the living standards of many ordinary men and women who have fought for this country and done so much to make it great.

I listened the other night to one of the most heart-breaking pleas that I have ever heard. I received a phone call from one of my constituents and when she finished speaking to me I was in tears. The woman has a mentally handicapped son who is suffering from Down's syndrome. Her husband has suffered a massive heart attack and is on invalidity pension. Until recently she was paying £16 in rent and rates, but has now received the bombshell news that she has to pay £105. That is an increase of £89. The woman was absolutely shattered and does not know where she will get an extra £89 to keep her family. That is an enormous and obscene increase for someone in such dire circumstances. Knowing this Government, I could not offer her much hope. However, I have now heard the speech of the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) and I hope that there are many like him who can give us support.

I heard another hon. Member speak about winners and losers. This must be the most obscene race ever created when we can see winners and losers in a society with millions of people unemployed and millions living on state benefits through no fault of their own. Talk in the House about winners and losers must be stopped. There should be no losers. All people should be able to gain and live a better life.

The social fund has been mentioned. I understand from the social workers of Strathclyde regional council that one of the first refusals has occurred. Social fund help was refused to a single-parent family in which there is a young boy under five years of age who has a heart murmur and an enlarged heart. A room caught fire in the house in which he lives and the bedding and beds were burnt to a cinder. His mother went to see whether she could obtain a community care grant after being advised by the social work department. Unbelievably, she was turned down.

There is nothing more blatant and open than a room burnt to a cinder. How can that person be denied a bed and bedding? I do not know what the social fund is all about. I understand that the young lady had been considered for a budgeting loan. Yet social workers have looked at her budget and said that her outstanding debt will not allow her to obtain a loan. Therefore, she is destitute. She needs help and the only place from which she can obtain that help is the Government, but the Government have turned their back on her this week.

I have in my hand the saddest letter I have ever received. I will not go into detail because the young lady wishes to remain anonymous. The letter is from an 18-year-old girl whose mother died last year. She has now become the legal guardian of her 14-year-old sister and is looking after her. She has written——

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I object strongly to the Government Front Bench laughing and giggling while we hear details of this tragic letter. It deals precisely with the issues involved in this debate.

Mr. Graham: As I have said, the young lady is looking after her 14-year-old sister. She works for the Government in a Civil Service department in a low-paid job. The Government's actions have abolished free school meals and free school milk and her young sister will not be able to receive those things because her elder sister is in work. She does not know what will happen as a result of the new legislation.

That letter was from a young kid who is trying to stand on her own two feet and keep her young family together so that they can face the world and have a better life. The Government are making it more difficult for her as time goes on.

I have received another letter from a pensioner. The man concerned worked and fought for this country and now receives a miserable pension. He now has to pay double the amount of rent that he paid before. That person does not know what to do.

I have had the sad experience of walking through my constituency and seeing some shops selling yesterday's bread at half price. I have had the sad experience of walking through supermarkets and seeing elderly men and women and disabled people hunting about looking for scraps and out-of-date food. Is that the sort of society into which we are driving our folk? I attended a jumble sale the other night and saw people queueing up to buy old clothes in order to clothe their children. I have seen old women buying bashed tins at half price. Is that the sort of society we want?

One Minister has said that 16 to 17-year-olds need to speak to their parents about the benefit cuts to see whether they can help them; that if their parents cannot help them, they should speak to charities and local authorities; and that, if that does not help, they may be taken into care. I wonder whether the Minister could comment on that statement.

I plead with the Government to bring some sanity, fairness and justice into the system and ensure that people are not driven into the mire. We should stop this talk about winners and losers and allow my constituents to live

[Mr. Graham]

with dignity and pride and finish their lives in comfort. They should not be driven to putting a wee bit aside for their coffin. That is an obscenity. Offer us some comfort and throw out the nonsensical social fund. Offer us something that meets the needs of Britain today, not the Britain of Victorian days.

5.56 pm

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): I shall be brief in this extremely important debate.

There has been substantial argument about the application of the changes to the people to whom they are directed. The thrust of the Secretary of State's argument and the concept with which the Government are seeking to grapple is to design or redesign a system suitable for the needs that are now apparent within the state. We must start from the premise that we are affording £46 billion per annum for social security provisions. That is a proud record of the Government that no one should seek to deny. We have to decide how best that sum should be spent in a way that is consistent with the obligations of the Government to ensure that social provision reaches those in greatest need.

I want to pay tribute to the courage of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his predecessor in seeking to develop changes in a system that few had the courage to touch. We cannot deal with a fundamental review of the 1944-47 system without making significant changes. It is no use trying to make progress on the one hand without having change on the other. We have to change. The argument before the House tonight is the extent to which the changes make the system unworkable or inappropriate for those who will receive benefits.

No one could fail to be moved by the eloquence of the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Fjeld) or by the significant contribution made by my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle). Both have voiced their anxiety that what is happening now will not fulfil the task that has been set before the Government. I have little doubt that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his team will be among those monitoring closely the effectiveness of the changes. I have equally little doubt that a review when the issues have been put to the test is infinitely better than combating figures from various groups on their assessment of a projected element of benefit take-up.

Ms. Ruddock: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Giles Shaw: No. I promised to be brief.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is seeking to carry out the radical change in our benefit system that we felt, and continue to feel, was necessary in a way that relieves much of the bureaucratic nightmare of the present system yet in a way that is designed to put £46 billion of taxpayers' money into the hands of those who really need it.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North) *rose*——

Sir Giles Shaw: The effectiveness of my right hon. Friend's actions must be viewed in the light of the comments of the hon. Member for Birkenhead and of my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar. Only then can we be sure that the good intentions that are encapsulated in the policy will be properly and truly delivered. That is why I shall support my right hon. Friend in the Lobby tonight.

6 pm

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I have received a letter—one of many hundreds that I received when I was first elected—from the Rev. David Watkins, who lives in my constituency. He asked me to ensure that people on low incomes and those who find it difficult to manage are protected. I would not be carrying out my duty as an elected representative if I did not speak in the debate and represented the interests of the people about whom he was talking.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham), I am concerned by talk about gainers and losers. When I listened to the Secretary of State talking at Question Time yesterday about the facts of the matter, I did not know which way to turn next. What does it matter whether people are losers or gainers? Hon. Members are being contacted by hundreds of people who are telling them that they cannot manage because of these substantial reductions.

I can best demonstrate the problem by referring to a letter from a constituent. She writes:

"I wonder if you could speak up in the house of commons . . . on our behalf. I am a householder. I have an unemployed sister and an old-age pensioner sister. I am on supplementary benefit. I have just received a £1·30p increase and my rates have been increased from paying £57 half yearly to £209 half yearly and water rates £136 yearly. I don't have any savings, so how can they possibly expect people to pay these bills, gas and electric insurances, etc.? I am making myself ill worrying about this as I am sure so many other people are with similar problems. They say we will be better off—how? Why can't they stop living in their own world and see how people really are struggling just to live on the poverty line? We don't smoke, drink and have not had a holiday in 8 years because we couldn't afford it and at Christmas it's heartbreaking to receive gifts and not be able to buy anything back for fear of getting into debt. I know they won't do anything because they just don't care, only for the rich, but at least our views can be known when they say how much better off we are. Thank you."

I make no apology for reading that short note, which sums up most admirably the difficulties facing people.

I have sat through the debate and listened to the lack-lustre performance of the Secretary of State. The fact that so many hon. Members are intervening to speak of individual constituency cases shows that, whatever the Prime Minister may say about the facts, the vast majority of people who are dependent on benefits are worried sick and cannot manage. They want the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Social Services and the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security to tell them how they can maintain a decent standard of living on these paltry sums of money.

I do not have any illusions that the Government will give in. The Prime Minister has already said that she does not intend to do anything about the £6,000 per year limit, about which we have heard so much. Perhaps we shall be as successful, as my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) was in obtaining this debate, and get that limit changed slightly.

Such a change will lead only to modifications, but there are many more modifications that the Government could make if they cared. They could take note of the many miners and miners' widows who are being penalised by these new arrangements. They are having to receive

payment in lieu of free coal which previously they received. If the Government cared, there are many ways in which they could make modifications.

I challenge the Government to carry out some proper research and to fund independent research to help citizens, the citizens advice bureau in Stoke-on-Trent, the university of Keele and independent research throughout the country so that in a short time we can obtain information and the facts. We could use that information and those facts to ensure that people who are not living with dignity have an improved standard of living. Failure to do that will bring much more quickly a Labour Government who care and only the Government will pay the price.

6.4 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Many of the matters that have been raised in the debate have not, I regret, been raised more forcefully in previous debates. There were adequate opportunities to discuss the matter during debates on the Social Security Act 1986 and the housing benefit regulations.

I take issue with Opposition Members who have referred to this measure as a vicious attack on the poor. We must consider the global position in relation to the resources that are given. In 1978-79, the social security buget was £16·4 billion. Today it is £46·4 billion, which is the largest ever social security budget.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way,?

Mr. Hind: I shall not give way, because I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to catch Mr. Speaker's eye later.

Under the new system, two fundamental matters must be brought forward and considered carefully. The right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) referred to the most important intention of this legislation —to deal with the unemployment trap. In the long term there must be incentives for people to take employment and to seek work. A gap must exist between those receiving benefit and those in work. It must be made worth while to seek a job. The figures for the number of long-term unemployed people show that the largest number of long-term unemployed people are in the south-east, where job vacancies are at the highest level and where opportunities are being offered.

The new system does away with the old, bad anomalies in the previous system. They have been tackled and the unemployment trap is much better controlled than it was in the past.

Social security benefits are a safety net; they are not intended to become a way of life for people. Unfortunately, I have experienced the problems—I am sure that other hon. Members have experienced them—of people being unemployed on a long-term basis who have rounded down their expectations of income to the levels of various unemployment benefits. I recommend that hon. Members go to a job club and talk to people attending on the first day about motivation. They should then return at the end of the week and see the difference. The job club has built up people's expectations and made people believe in themselves and appreciate that matters can be improved.

An edifice has built up in recent years and it has created the unemployment benefit dependent society, which Labour Governments predominantly built up. If Beveridge were to come back he would not recognise the system that he created in 1944. The system was devised to deal with hardship by what we in Lancashire and Yorkshire call the pan crack. If hon. Members ask people on benefit in Lancashire and Yorkshire what they are living on, they say, "Pan crack, lad." The crack has been filled in and overlaid many times as the system has built up.

We must deal with the unemployment culture, and one of the ways to do so is by this new system.

First, the problem of people who have families with young children was tackled. Where is the incentive for people who are staying at home watching television— *[Interruption.]* Those people who are sitting at home getting depressed will feel that there is no incentive to go out and do anything. This system targets resources on families with children, who will be better off under this system.

I represent a constituency with high unemployment. Like Opposition Members, I have received distressing letters, but interestingly enough I have not had one letter from families with children to whom the major part of this policy has been directed and who will benefit from it.

I suggest that Opposition Members do not do themselves justice in some of their criticisms. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) referred to two samples—one from the Oxford study, and another from Strathclyde. Those samples are far too small. Anyone who has done any research will realise that 200 is far too small a sample to consider. The Wandsworth sample took into account single payments. Because of that, the reduction in income appears to be much larger.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow) *rose——*

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray) *rose——*

Mr. Hind: I am sure that the hon. Members will get an opportunity to speak.

Only 9 per cent. of those who are eligible for single payments have claimed them.

Dr. Godman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hind: No.

We must consider those matters carefully, instead of winding up the anxieties of the public.

I accept that certain vulnerable groups will lose out. Conservative Members have anxieties about housing benefit because in the majority of cases the losers in this system are those in receipt of housing benefit and not from the system in general. Therefore, perhaps my right hon. Friend and his ministerial colleagues will look at that in the long term. I suggest that he does not need primary legislation to deal with it. No doubt he will review the matter in the long term and will take on board some of my hon. Friends' comments.

The hon. Member for Livingston referred to Mrs. Godden and to disabled people. One factor that has not been highlighted by Opposition Members is that special provision has been made for 15,000 severely disabled people. Opposition Members ignore the fact that a trust has been set up and it is likely that many of those people will be in the same position when the matter is sorted out as they are today.

[Mr. Hind]

I can recall the occasions on which we debated what is now the Social Security Act. We talked for hours about severely disabled people. My right hon. Friend has made real efforts to deal with the severely disabled and he should be given credit for that and for listening to the comments.

I return to the point on which I started my remarks. Under the budget, £46·4 billion is being spent on social security for the next 12 months—the biggest expenditure ever. In the past 12 months there has been a fall of 500,000 in the number of people unemployed. That is a large number of people who will not now be eligible to claim. We must take into consideration the fact that fewer people will benefit from a larger budget. Opposition Members say, "What do you tell them in Skelmersdale?" In the new town of Skelmersdale, in my constituency, 1,500 people have jobs and consequently will not be claiming from the social fund. I am not suggesting that the system is perfect. Criticisms have been made about the social fund and about housing benefit.

Dr Godman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on the question of the social fund?

Mr. Hind: Those matters can be dealt with along the way. They need not be subject to primary legislation.

Overall, this is a courageous attempt to tackle a very difficult problem. My hon. Friends have dealt with it well. They have tackled a very difficult problem and they have suggested solutions that, obviously, many people do not like. Let us give it a chance to work, and when we find flaws, let us monitor those flaws and correct them in the long term. It is up to hon. Members on both sides of the House to bring forward cases and argue points. This is a good system that will stand the test of time, and I commend it to my hon. Friends.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It may be helpful if I say that I understand that the first Front-Bench spokesman will seek to rise at 6.35 pm. In the intervening time, if hon. Members are brief, I shall be able to call more of them.

6.16 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): When the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) considers what he said this evening he will find on reflection that it will not do him any credit. He started his speech by saying that we should look at the global benefit provisions. I remind him that £25 billion or £26 billion of the £46 billion that he mentioned actually relates to national insurance contributory benefits which cover pensions, widows' benefits, unemployment benefits, industrial injury benefits, family benefits, death grants and maternity allowances under the old system. If he were honest about it he would say that he was concerned only about the £8 billion that covers benefits such as supplementary benefit under the old system and £3·5 billion that relates to housing benefit. It is disingenuous of him to use global figures as if the £46 billion were all going direct to benefit of that kind in the coming year.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman said that he was surprised that people were suddenly enthusiastic to speak on this subject. I do not think that he served on the Standing Committee which considered the Social Security Bill in 1986. If he did, he was conspicuous in that he said absolutely nothing on the record. If he was on the Committee he should have taken that opportunity to unburden himself at that time.

Mr. Hind: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kirkwood: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. He has made his own speech and he can reflect on it later.

As an hon. Member who tried to take an active part in that Committee, I found it very difficult indeed to make any sense of the primary legislation. The primary legislation contained no detailed figures of what is happening to claimants now that all the rates of benefits and rebates are available. Nor did the primary legislation say anything about the detail that would be given in the statutory instruments or the guidance given to social fund officers that followed from the primary legislation. That made it almost impossible for hon. Members on that Standing Committee to make any real judgments about the full and dramatic effects of the legislation on individuals when the scheme was implemented.

I can give the House a brief example of that. The Social Security Act 1986 states that social fund officers must "have regard" to the budget in coming to their decisions —that is to say, the budget of their own integrated local DHSS offices. The recently published guidelines, however, contain a different version of the phrase "have regard". They state that an officer must

"under no circumstances make an award resulting in overspending against the local office's budget."

That is entirely different in tone and interpretation from the discussions that we had in Committee. During the Committee stage it was therefore very difficult to make any sense of what was actually to happen.

It is wrong to suggest that hon. Members could have made those detailed points before now. I agree with the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) who said that this was a watershed debate. It is a watershed debate because hon. Members are being forced to pay regard to the changes because they are now beginning to hit them where it hurts—in their constituency clinics and in the constituency work that they undertake.

The hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) said that he was confident that the Government would monitor the effects of the new system. I have serious doubts about whether they will. If, at the end of the debate, the Minister is able to say that he will monitor month by month the effect of the reforms, I shall be slightly happier.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is the responsibility of every hon. Member to ensure that Department of Health and Social Security Ministers are inundated with every constituency case that is put to us?

Mr. Kirkwood: I agree entirely with the hon. Lady. No other course is open to hon. Members. The hon. Lady has given sound advice and I, for one, shall take it.

It cannot be disputed that housing benefit will be reduced by £650 million. Of the £420 million that has been allocated to income support, £200 million will only be to cover transitional support. The hon. Member for Lancashire, West said that those losing housing benefit will suffer the most. However, when the transitional income support protection wears away, he will only then realise the true, full impact of these income support cuts.

There will not therefore in reality be an additional £420 million for income support. I accept that there is to be an increase of £200 million in the budget for family credit, but it takes no account of the £120 million that has already been saved by recently freezing child benefit. It takes no account, either, of the take-up rate. The Government's target is a 60 per cent. rate of take-up as opposed to a 50 per cent. take-up rate for the existing family income supplement.

The Government spent huge sums of money on advertising shares in privatisations such as British Telecom and BP. Instead of engaging in fancy privatisation advertising, they should have advertised on television what is available under the social security system. It is a scandal and a disgrace that the savings that these reforms will make for the Treasury are between £300 million and £600 million. If Conservative Members do not recognise that fact now, they will recognise it in a year's time when individual constituency cases start to hit them in their surgeries and correspondence.

The social fund budget for next year is just over £200 million. The Government make as much as they can out of that, but the real figure that is allocated for social fund grants is only £60 million. That expenditure has to be contrasted with the single payments budget for the last financial year, which totalled £190 million. That highlights the swingeing nature of the cuts in the social fund.

The way in which the community care grants will be applied in practice is a great disappointment to me. The Green Paper stated that community care grants would be made to avert the need for institutional care for frail, elderly claimants. There is no way in which the £30 single one-off payments can begin to provide care in the community for such people. The social fund guidelines, in their full and collective glory, that are now being sent to social fund officers make that fact very clear. I am very disappointed that the opportunity has not been taken to make institutionalised care a thing of the past and real and effective care a thing of the future.

As for the way in which pensioners are to be treated, the speech of the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) will repay careful study. The way that this Government have treated pensioners in general is a scandal. They should take the advice of their own Social Security Advisory Committee and every so often increase pensions above the figure that is justified by increases in the retail prices index. If the Government are not prepared to take the advice of the Social Security Advisory Committee, what advice are they prepared to take? The Government have carried out no research and there has been no proper consultation. The way in which the Government have handled the reform is a disgrace and they deserve to reap their reward at the hands of the public at the next general election.

6.25 pm

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) was right to stress the importance of monitoring the developments of the new arrangements. The unease that has been expressed in many speeches on both sides of the House may to some extent be alleviated if the monitoring is close and if certain changes are made in the months to come. There will be many opportunities for that to happen because the regulations are governed by secondary legislation. If they were so minded, the Government could put changes into effect fairly quickly.

In his speech my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State seemed to express surprise that an emergency debate was necessary, as the matter had been debated so thoroughly and at great length in the past. That is a perfectly fair point, but the position has changed in the last few days. There is a feeling of emergency in the DHSS office in my constituency. The telephone lines are jammed almost permanently and large queues are spilling out into the street. The beleaguered staff inside have only two copies of the income support adjudication guide. It is being passed around 120 officials who are struggling to answer the often emotional and sometimes hysterical queries from pensioners and other claimants. I am glad that from these Benches my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) sounded a note of unease that ought to be answered in the winding-up speech. It is right that the Government should be aware of such anxieties.

What is going on in Ramsgate, the biggest DHSS office in south-east England, with 16,000 claimants, is going on in DHSS offices up and down the country. All major reforms face start-up problems. At the beginning they are bound to create difficulties for some people. The question we have to ask ourselves is whether these are just teething troubles or whether there is something radically wrong with the reforms that have been put in place. We have to return to the first principles that lie behind the reforms.

I do not disagree that the supplementary benefit arrangements were far too complicated and needed to be simplified. Moreover, benefits for all are the enemy of care for the few. We need better targeting to give most help to those who are most in distress. The Government are increasing expenditure on social security benefits. Next year they will total £48 billion, which is 13 per cent. of gross domestic product. It cannot be right to attack the Government for stinginess or meanness when they have introduced the reforms that these principles seek to enshrine.

The reforms are right in principle but they are flawed in practice. There are three major flaws. The first flaw is the £6,000 housing benefit cut-off point. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar that this figure is too low. My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) and I represent one of the largest concentrations of pensioners with slender means in the south-east of England. They live on the margin; their life is not easy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar referred to the fact that pensioners plan ahead in order to live in accordance with their means. They take into account the housing benefit that they already receive. If their standard of living is to be somewhat derailed by this arbitrary cut-off point—fixed, incidentally, without any relationship to income—it is bound to cause widespread distress and anxiety. There has to be a cut-off point, but what that is has to be a matter of judgment.

I agree that the cut-off point should be £10,000. Alternatively, let us have a sliding scale starting at the £6,000 cut-off point and going up slowly to a £10,000 cut-off point. I feel that the guillotine suddenness of total decapitation of housing benefit at £6,000 of savings is wrong. Unless my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State

[Mr. Jonathan Aitken]

wants to go down in history as the Robespierre of housing benefit for hard-up pensioners, I urge him to find a higher—and gentler—limit as soon as possible.

There is also the plight of the unemployed, striving to clamber back into employment through part-time work. They are being clobbered by the new rules: they can keep only the first £5 a week of their earnings before losing £1 in benefit for every pound that they earn. That level needs some adjustment.

A constituent of mine, Mrs. Fiona Thomas of Broadstairs, wrote me a moving letter. As a one-parent family, she is therefore given a £15 rather than a £5 limit. She writes:

"I have taken the step of trying to help myself by getting a part time job in a chemists. I now work twenty-hours a week, come home tired out, and all I can keep of my wages is £15 and all expenses like childminder and bus fares also have to come out of that £15. Before income support one could claim expenses back. Is it really worth trying to work?"

I think that the answer, at present, must be no.

Anyone with a high-unemployment constituency knows that part-time work is often the best ladder back into full-time work, and I believe that we should help people to get back on to that ladder—back into the habit of work—back to a place where they can grab vacancies in full-time jobs. Part-time jobs are today's socio-economic trend, and we need to encourage rather than discourage those who climb the ladder.

It is not clear whether the teething troubles to which I have referred will last. It all depends on the Government's responsiveness to criticism. It is easy for them to move by secondary legislation, in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement, or even sooner. We need some fine tuning, and perhaps some fine rethinking. I hope to hear some encouraging words in the winding-up speech before I decide how I shall vote tonight.

6.31 pm

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): I shall respect your request, Mr. Speaker, to sit down in four minutes' time to enable the Minister to make his winding-up speech. First, however, let me say one or two things very quickly.

I cannot understand some of the Government's arguments about the Opposition using lies to make party political points or to advance propaganda. During the last week, while I have been in my constituency, I have not been sitting there with old people—or young people—listening to lies. I have been listening to the truth. I have heard exactly what is happening to them, as from the beginning of April.

I find it deplorable that we are being accused of using this debate for party-political propaganda. The fact is that literally thousands of our people who have not been well off all their lives are now finding it impossible to meet their bills and demands. To sit between old people on a Sunday afternoon and try to placate them and allay their worries is difficult enough in most circumstances. But now I cannot even say, "Do not worry—we will work something out," because injustice is built into the legislation.

There is no doubt about the problems of, for example, an old-age pensioner living alone. Last night at 9.50 pm, before the vote, I received a telephone call asking, "Where shall I find £87 to pay my rates? I have to pay one fifth of the charge." There is no way in which that person can find the money. No longer can I say, "I will certainly go for an appeal. I will try to help you out, and argue the case." All that has been taken away from Members of the House—and, of course, from social workers and any other body trying to help.

I ask the Government to listen to the pleas that are being made. For goodness' sake, let us take the party-political blinkers from the Government's eyes so that they can see the suffering, pain and anxiety that they are inflicting on many people who deserve a darn sight better. That is all we ask.

I have had more telephone calls. Only today, at about 6.30, I attended to another. I was asked to request the Government to monitor and review the position genuinely in the future, and I ask the Minister now whether the Government will do that. I do not know whether they can. I am not sure how we shall know how many people have been refused in DHSS offices, and then go home and live with the misery—or go to their families, who are already under pressure with their mortgages and children. We shall never know the full figure.

However, I make this plea: will the Government please monitor the position honestly and sincerely, take away their present political prejudice and come back to the House in six months, so that we can have another debate? Then we can produce not one, not two, but hundreds of cases to prove that the legislation is causing unnecessary suffering to all concerned.

6.35 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): When the Secretary of State opened the debate he made two revealing remarks that he may live to regret. First, he made a point of telling us that the proposals had been fully debated, thrashed out and explained over the past three years—years in which his predecessors and he have ridiculed and ignored all representations about the damaging net effects of their proposed legislation. What the Secretary of State was telling us, and what should be clearly set on the record today, is that the Government have made no mistake in what they are doing. They knew what would happen to the individuals and families whom we have discussed, and they chose to proceed.

The second thing that the Secretary of State said was that under the old system people had been locked into dependency, not liberated. One million of those whom the Government describe as a reduced caseload, who lose all entitlement to housing benefit, should clearly be grateful to the Government for liberating them from dependency. Felicity Godden should be grateful. She has been entirely liberated from the supplementary benefit that she now dependently draws. The way in which her case has been dealt with today and yesterday has been most instructive.

It is entirely true—as the Minister says, the Government have known all along—that the most severely disabled have always stood to be the greatest losers. It is fair to remind the House that the Government, knowing that, resisted to the last ditch—until they lost a vote in the other place—all demands to bridge the gap between what the severely disabled receive today and what they will be entitled to receive from this week. Finally, having lost that vote, they introduced a very limited premium for some of the severely disabled, but still with many losers remaining.

Only a few weeks ago, at the last gasp of the legislation, the Government came up with a proposal for the Independent Living Fund, a charitable fund from which

there would be no right to help, and no independent appeal against refusal, but worst of all—at present—no fund. The Government have had three years, yet there are no trustees, no application form and no money. The Department has known for four weeks that Mrs. Godden would lose £48 a week: it told her, after all. Why was she not notified about the fund? Why was she not encouraged to make an application? Where is the information about the interim arrangements for payment that the Minister of State mentioned in passing yesterday, for the first time that I recall inside or outside the House?

All that Mrs. Godden has received from the Government are sneers, abuse and half-truths. Yesterday the Secretary of State said that his offices had not been able to contact her because she had been on holiday, which gave a few of his hon. Friends a good laugh, but Mrs. Godden has been back for 12 days.

The Secretary of State and the Prime Minister talked yesterday about inaccuracies in the story about Mrs. Godden, because they wanted the full list of all the help that she is not losing. Today the Secretary of State spoke about a 19-year-old son who is earning and implied—although he did not actually say it—that he was contributing to the household. He is not. He is only 19. He is a chef, and, as hon. Members on both sides of the House will know, under the Government his wages are so low that he is not able to contribute more than £15 for his own light, washing and heating. He can make no more contribution.

Today also, the Secretary of State said that Mrs. Godden had had a visit from the social services department who offered some domestic help. I understand that the last visit from anyone was on Friday and that some bits and pieces of extra help were offered, but nothing systematic or coherent. The bits and pieces of help included an offer to put the two-year-old child in a nursery, which Mrs. Godden does not want, having herself experienced being in care and not wishing any of her children to have to go into the care of the statutory services. That was the offer that the Secretary of State said was refused.

In all fairness to the Secretary of State, it should again be on the record that at no point did he or the Prime Minister deny that Mrs. Godden is losing £48 a week from this week. Does the Secretary of State deny that now?

Mr. Moore *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Beckett: I see that the right hon. Gentleman shakes his head.

I tell the Secretary of State bluntly that he and the Prime Minister should be ashamed of the way in which the implication has been made in the House that there is something dubious about Mrs. Godden's case. I challenge the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister to go and see Mrs. Godden and explain to her why the changes are a good idea. Mrs. Godden's offence is that she is a living contradiction of the Government's propaganda, which has implied that everybody will somehow be protected. The Government know that she is only one of those for whom no protection is available.

There are others who lose, as Mrs. Godden does, from rule changes, including the war pensioners, quoted by the citizens advice bureaux, who stand to lose on average £10 a week. I understand that the Prime Minister talks a lot about Winston. I wonder what Winston would have had to say about that. Of course, there are others who lose, as Lilian Williams does, from the levels of benefits now paid. They are all cases that give the lie to the Government's statement that 88 per cent. of people will be no worse off.

Many of those who show up as gainers on the Government's figures will be substantially worse off, because the Government will not look at the net effects of all the changes that are being made. The St. Clairs, referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), whose figures the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) questioned, confirm that their basic entitlement under income support is indeed £70·05, which is some £18 less than they get today. It remains the case that they have had to give up the idea of moving to more suitable accommodation, because they would lose transitional protection if they did so, and they are trapped in their present situation.

A case was quoted yesterday in the House of someone who will be £1·60 a week better off in cash terms, but worse off by some £12 a week because of the loss of discretionary free school meals. Again, that is someone who shows up as a gainer on the Government's figures. Jim Foley, who, like Felicity Godden, should presumably be grateful to the Government for liberating him from dependency on benefit—he is certainly grateful that he has benefited from having a heart transplant—has had £1·60 added to his invalidity benefit entitlement, but he now loses all opportunity for help with fares. Because he is a heart transplant patient he must return to Papworth hospital at least every four, and sometimes every two weeks. He has to be accompanied because he is a diabetic and because he is so near to the time when he had his transplant. That travel costs him £158 per trip. He will get no help for that now, but under the Government's figures he shows up as a gainer.

The Government ignore not only the direct net effects on the standard of living but the net effects upon society. The young single homeless, who may have taken the advice of the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) and got on their bikes to look for work, will be left utterly destitute. There should not be young people wandering the streets alone, but there are, and the strains on poor families as a result of the cuts in benefits that we have been discussing today, particularly the cuts in benefit for the young, will mean that there are likely to be more in future than there are now.

The only accommodation available to such people is bed and breakfast, but in future that accommodation will not be available because benefit will be paid, if at all, in arrears. In London, in particular, young people are likely to need £150 before they reach their first pay day and the landlords of bed-and-breakfast accommodation are not accustomed to waiting for payment and simply will not take people. Of course, such people can apply for a crisis loan, but they are young and single and that means that they have no priority, even if they could be offered one large enough to cover the sort of sum needed.

Will such people have to swell the numbers of those sleeping rough or find other ways of making £150? How long will it be before we find the Home Office once again bewailing the rising crime figures—the rising figures for prostitution or drug offences—because the Government look only at part of the picture, the DHSS savings, and forget the cost in damaged lives?

More and more the Government exemplify the adage—they certainly have done in this debate—that the louder

[Mrs. Beckett]

they talked of their honour, the faster we counted the spoons. The debates on the whole process of the Government's social security changes are an echo of all the debates that we have had on the National Health Service —fancy footwork, fancy figures, fancy words and grim reality for those who are not talking about what the Government are doing, but are living through it.

The fine words that the Secretary of State has uttered about transitional protection and help for the future will lead, most of all, to a hypothetical Felicity Jones, who, later this year, like the real Felicity Godden, is diagnosed as having multiple sclerosis, who finds herself ultimately with the same needs, difficulties and family problems, but who will never get the £48 that Mrs. Godden loses from this week—just one of the millions of future claimants who will be even poorer than those we have discussed today. What is the Government's motto for them? Is it "What you have never had, you never miss"?

The Government claim that they are simplifying the system, but the housing benefit form is now 20 pages, where it was four. They claim that they are targeting help on those in greatest need—a claim which has been shown over and over in the debate to be completely untrue. Most of all, they say that they cannot afford to do any more. That is the greatest untruth of all. It is plainly obvious from what was done in the Budget that the Government's record embodies the other adage, that there is one law for the rich and another for the poor. The Government have cast that in stone as a deliberate choice and a deliberate policy.

6.46 pm

The Minister for Social Security and the Disabled (Mr. Nicholas Scott): In a sense, the debate comes at a curious time, and that is no criticism of the Chair. It comes at a time when the broad outlines of the reforms that we are discussing have been known for some years, when the details have been known for some months, and when we have had a series of debates on detailed aspects of the reforms, some in prime time and some after 10 o'clock, where the most outstanding characteristic of those debates has been the Opposition's inability to assemble any strength on the Opposition Benches to talk about these matters. The assembled strength on the Opposition Benches tonight owes rather more to the proximity of the local government elections than it does to their lately found concern for the poor.

Of course, in making that criticism I make no comment about the sustained, intelligent and well-informed campaigns that have been run by the Opposition Front Bench, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and a number of others who have maintained their interest in this subject and who have sought to present constructive criticisms of what the Government intend to do. I criticise only some of the behaviour that we have had in the House today.

The debate may be rather late because the details and the broad outlines of the changes have been known for some time. But, in a sense, it is also rather too early because it is difficult for us to assess in detail at this stage the impact of the reforms. We have had a great deal of speculation, much of it ill-informed. A considerable number of individual cases have been brought before the House with so-called evidence spelt out which, on the facts of the case, are found to be flawed. We should wait to see how the reforms work out in practice.

Ms. Ruddock: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Scott: No, I will not give way. The hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) and I shortened our speeches to enable as many hon. Members as possible to speak and I should like to get further into my speech before I give way to anybody.

Because of what I have just said about how difficult it is at this point to assess the impact of the changes on classes or individuals, the Government will give a clear and unequivocal undertaking to monitor with great care and sympathy the implementation of the reforms.

I know that we will not be the only people monitoring the impact of the reforms. I imagine that Opposition Members will be doing so too, and I know that academic organisations and welfare rights groups will be monitoring the impact.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Scott: No. The hon. Lady knows that I normally give way, but I should like to get on with my speech.

As the reforms bed down and people grow accustomed to their working, we will be carefully monitoring the outcome of the reforms and seeing how they work out in practice. As I have said before, in social security, nothing is for ever. We live in a dynamic society. We need a changing society. There are changing patterns of need in society and obviously, therefore, the need for provision must also change. We shall be monitoring that carefully as the weeks and months go by.

If anyone outside the House had listened to the Opposition's contributions this afternoon, he would have imagined that the reforms were about cuts in public expenditure, imposing some new and, dare I say it, wicked measures on the poor.

Mr. Frank Field *rose——*

Mr. Scott: I shall deal in a moment with the serious point raised by the hon. Gentleman. I take his points seriously and with great respect.

Opposition Members have launched a great exercise of hunt the losers. They say, "Scour the country for individuals. Ignore the fact that the Government are putting £2 billion of extra expenditure into social security provision this year. Ignore the fact that, in cash terms, nine people out of 10 will be better off or no worse off after implementation. Forget that £1 in every £3 that the Government spend now goes on social security, whereas, when Labour left office, it was £1 in every £4. Forget, above all, the imperative to reform."

We needed to change the social security system. Since 1948, it had "just grow'd", like Topsy. Bits had been bolted on to it in a haphazard way to meet new needs without any sense of trying to obtain a coherent pattern of provision for those in real need. The time had come to tackle that. I can take no credit for that. My predecessors and those of my right hon. Friend had the courage to face up to that in 1985 and 1986 and set the pattern that we shall now be able to implement.

I remember the vehemence with which Opposition Members criticised the sale of council houses. I remember

the way that they have adopted that, and now they do not want to go back to the old days. In a year or two, nobody will want to go back to the old system of social security.

It is worth reminding the House once more why we are implementing the reforms. We wanted to simplify a system that had become incomprehensible to claimants and difficult to administer. So far as possible, we wanted to get rid of the unemployment and poverty traps and to give people as much choice as possible.

Conservative Members did not make an issue of Mrs. Godden, but, as both the hon. Members for Livingston (Mr. Cook) and for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) have again raised the case, I thought that it might be worth going back to see what Mrs. Godden would have been entitled to when the Labour party was last in office. In 1979, Mrs. Godden would have been entitled to a mobility allowance of £10, attendance allowance of £14, a non-contributory invalidity pension of £16·80 and child benefit of £6·90. That comes to £47·70, which, uprated to current prices, gives a total of £96·50. Today she is entitled to £117·30.

I want to address the serious point about housing benefit put to me by some of my hon. Friends and by one or two Opposition Members. Of course, it is easy to select the capital cut-off of £6,000 and to say that, in some ways, it undermines the reform of housing benefit, but is should be worth the House's while to remember the benefits that will flow from the reform of that provision. In future, people in and out of work will be treated the same. There will be 100 per cent. support for rents and 80 per cent. support for rates for the most needy. We are now spending almost £5 billion on housing benefit. That is more money in real terms than the Labour party was spending when it left office.

However, I recognise my hon. Friend's concern when they talk about the £6,000 limit, and I ask them to address two issues. One of the benefits that has flowed from the reform of social security has been the alignment of the capital cut-off for all three income-related benefits. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, housing benefit is only one way of providing for the needs of poorer people. Income support provides another form of help for those people. I wonder whether my hon. Friends who urge a £6,000 capital cut-off for housing benefit would want to see all the income-related benefits extended in the same way.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: They want £10,000.

Mr. Scott: They want to raise it from £6,000 to £10,000.

Of course I recognise that a line, wherever it is drawn, will be open to criticism, but it is not right in principle that people who may be on broadly the same income as those on housing benefit should be subsidising those who are entitled to that benefit. I do not believe that it is proper targeting of any benefit when it goes to one household in three. Although I have listened carefully to my hon. Friend's arguments, I believe that, when we seek to target benefits as accurately as possible, it would be wrong to consider the capital limit at the moment.

Ms. Ruddock: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Scott: No, I shall not give way.

I wish to deal with the serious point raised by the hon. Member for Birkenhead about the level of benefits. He accused the Government not just of an uncaring but of an unchristian attitude towards the poorest in our society. I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman can sustain that argument.

Mr. Frank Field *rose*——

Mr. Scott: The benefits that we are now administering are greater in real terms than they were in 1979. We have put substantial extra resources into those benefits, as the hon. Gentleman knows, so I do not know how he can complain that we have reduced them.

Ms. Ruddock: We do not have estimates in the London borough of Lewisham, but we now have assessments. There are 3,842 losers, compared with 2,758 gainers. Those people are losing sums of up to £25 a week. On the Government's assessment, they were poor people who were in need before the changes. They are now in even greater need.

Mr. Scott: I dare say that the hon. Lady is quoting from the local press. I am sorry that I gave way to her because I was trying to deal more broadly with the impact of the reforms. The Government's record in putting extra money in real terms into social security in excess of that paid out by the Labour Government acquits us of any accusations levelled by the hon. Member for Birkenhead or the hon. Member for Livingston of our being mean or not providing help for the poorest in our society. I am not ashamed to state that we want to target the help that is available on those who need it most.

Of course I recognise some of the apprehensions and concerns that have been addressed especially by some of my hon. Friends and by some Opposition Members. I have already given a clear undertaking that we will monitor carefully the impact of the reforms.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Scott: This year we will be spending £48 billion on social security. By 1990 we are budgeting to spend £53 billion. We could not have done that unless we were running a successful and prosperous economy. I do not believe that there is any chance that if Labour Members were in charge of the economic affairs of this country they could conceivably afford the pattern of social security that we are affording at the moment. I ask the House to support the Government in the Lobby.

Question put, That this House do now adjourn:—

The House divided: Ayes 215, Noes 311.

Division No. 254] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Blair, Tony
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*	Boateng, Paul
Allen, Graham	Boyes, Roland
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Bradley, Keith
Ashdown, Paddy	Bray, Dr Jeremy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Ashton, Joe	Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Buchan, Norman
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*	Buckley, George J.
Beckett, Margaret	Caborn, Richard
Beggs, Roy	Callaghan, Jim
Beith, A. J.	Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Bell, Stuart	Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*	Canavan, Dennis
Bermingham, Gerald	Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Bidwell, Sydney	Cartwright, John

Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John

Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.

HEALTH AND MEDICINES BILL [Money] (No. 2)

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Health and Medicines Bill, it is expedient to authorise the issue out of the Consolidated Fund and repayment with interest into the Consolidated Fund of any sum required for fulfilling any guarantee of the redemption or repayment of any stock issued or temporary loan raised by the successor company (within the meaning of any such Act) or of the payment of interest on any such stock or loan.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

Health and Medicines Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New Clause 12

TREASURY GUARANTEES

'(1) At any time when the successor company is wholly owned by the Crown the Treasury may guarantee, in such manner and on such conditions as they think fit, the redemption or repayment of any stock issued or temporary loan raised by the successor company and the payment of interest on any such stock or loan.

(2) Immediately after any guarantee is give under this section the Treasury shall lay a statement of the guarantee before each House of Parliament, and where any sum is issued for fulfilling such a guarantee or a guarantee such as is mentioned in subsection (6) below the Treasury shall, as soon as possible after the end of each financial year, beginning with that in which the sum is issued and ending with that in which all liability in respect of the principal of the sum and in respect of interest thereon is finally discharged, lay before each House of Parliament a statement relating to that sum.

(3) Any sums required by the Treasury for fulfilling any guarantee given or treated as given under this section shall be charged on and issued out of the Consolidated Fund.

(4) If any sums are issued in fulfilment of any guarantee give or treated as given under this section, the successor company shall make to the Treasury, at such times and in such manner as the Treasury may from time to time direct, payments of such amounts as the Treasury may direct in or towards repayment of the sums so issued and payments of interest on what is outstanding for the time being in respect of sums so issued, at such rates as the Treasury may direct.

(5) Any sums received by the Treasury under this section shall be paid into the Consolidated Fund.

(6) Any guarantee given by the Treasury under section 7 of the National Health Service Act 1966 with respect to a liability of the Corporation which becomes a liability of the successor company by virtue of section 1 above shall be treated as if it were a guarantee given under this section.

(7) Any guarantee given or treated as given under this section shall be extinguished when the successor company ceases to be wholly owned by the Crown.

(8) The successor company shall be regarded for the purposes of this Act as wholly owned by the Crown at any time when each of the issued shares in the company and the whole of any stock issued by it is held by, or by a nominee of, the Secretary of State.'.—*[Mrs. Currie.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

7.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mrs. Edwina Currie): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following:

Government new clause 13—*Statutory accounts of the successor company.*

Government new clause 14—*Corporation Tax.*

Governments amendments Nos. 20 to 22 and 24 to 27.

Amendment No. 41, in clause 3, page 2, line 27, leave out 'section' and insert 'sections'.

Government amendment No. 28.

Amendment No. 44, in page 2, line 45, at end insert—

'2B. The Corporation shall have the duty to furnish the Secretary of State with an Annual Report on the performance of its functions, and the Secretary of State shall have the duty to publish the report and to lay copies of the report before both Houses of Parliament.'.

Amendment No. 43, in page 2, line 45, at end insert—

'2C. The Corporation shall have the duty to satisfy itself, after consulting such bodies as appears to it to represent the interests of the public within the National Health Service, that the loans made pursuant to subsections 2A (c) and 2A (d) are available without discrimination in all areas of the country and to all medical practitioners in contract with a Family Practitioner Committee'.

Government amendment No. 29.

Mrs. Currie: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Government amendments Nos. 16, 17, and 18, which are further down the batting order, concern a definition of "private patient" and certain aspects of rights of admission to hospital. I undertook in Committee to come back on Report with a Government amendment which met the aims of Opposition amendment No. 117, which was debated in Committee. I am now advised that the amendments that we put down do not achieve what amendment No. 117 sought to achieve, nor do they meet our aims.

With the leave of the House, therefore, I shall not move amendments Nos. 16, 17 and 18. I undertake, however, to put down amendments in another place which will achieve those aims and reflect the sentiments of our discussion in Committee. I apologise to the House for that.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that the House will be indebted to the hon. Lady for what she has said.

Mrs. Currie: The principal effect of our clauses today is to enable the Government to reconstitute the General Practice Finance Corporation as a statutory company under the Companies Act 1985. Right hon. and hon. Members will know that private sector finance is now readily available for lending against all sorts of properties, including doctors' premises. Even with the existence of the GPFC, many doctors are turning to the private sector to meet their needs for financing practice accommodation.

With such funds readily available and rigorous competition among lenders, it makes sense to concentrate public resources on those things which only the public sector can do. We therefore intend that a major and reputable financial institution should be given the opportunity to acquire the GPFC and continue to administer it in the interests of doctors and patients and possibly other professionals, such as dentists.

As well as commanding the confidence of private sector investors, we wish to retain the interest and involvement of family doctors in the business. To this end, we are undertaking discussions with their representatives and with the corporation as to how best to achieve this.

We are also seeking powers to influence the content of the memorandum and articles of association so as to safeguard the main objectives of the present corporation through the successor body, and Government amendments Nos. 21 and 22 modify and clarify those powers.

In clause 3(3), as members of the Committee will know, we are increasing the corporation's borrowing powers to ensure that it remains actively in business pending the conclusion of the new arrangements that we propose.

The new clauses put down today are required to clarify the tax position, particularly during the transitional period between the old corporation and the successor company. Without new clause 14, there would be a substantial tax liability, which, of course, has never been our intention.

New clause 13 will avoid an unnecessary audit.

New clause 12 is needed to ensure Treasury powers to guarantee new borrowing—and existing borrowing—by the successor company as long as the body remains in public hands.

The Government amendments are also intended to render the changes consistent with other privatisations so that we can draw on successful experience in negotiations to come. It is on that basis that I move the new clause.

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): We are concerned that there has not been any consultation about the new clause which is now being brought in on Report. In particular, there has not been any consultation about the way in which the clause and the amendments would work with the General Practice Finance Corporation, from which I should have thought that the Government would want to seek advice in respect of such complicated and technical clauses.

The annual report of the GPFC has still not been published although it was submitted some time ago—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps the Minister is saying that it has been published. Indeed, we are glad of that at long last.

We are opposed to flogging off the GPFC. The new clause and the Government amendments do not alter the fundamental problem of clauses 1 to 3.

There is a need to improve primary care. Although GP services are a vital part of primary care, there are still some places where people have to travel too far to get to a GP's surgery. We need a strategic organisation that is publicly owned, such as the GPFC, to ensure that finance is available for setting up surgeries in areas where private capital might not otherwise be available to finance them.

We want the GPFC to be publicly owned, accountable and used as part of the Government's armoury to improve GPs' premises and to make them more accessible to disabled people. At present, many GPs' premises are not so accessible. We want the GPFC to invest public money in improving the services that are available at GPs' premises and to enable GPs to have new equipment, such as computers and new diagnostic equipment. That should be the role of a publicly owned and accountable body, which would be used by the Government strategically to improve primary care services.

In many cases, GPs' premises are currently not fit for the task that they are required to perform, let alone for the task that we should like to see them develop in the future, with increasing emphasis on the prevention of ill health and the promotion of good health.

The Government are planning to flog off the GPFC, with all its interests in GPs' premises, to the private sector. It could be bought up by a drug company or by an American commercial health care company. The Minister mentioned "reputable finance institutions", but there are no guarantees in either the clauses or the new clauses that there will be a reputable financial institution. We have no guarantee that financial interests in GPs' premises will not be bought up by drug companies or by American or other foreign-owned commercial health care companies. The Government are opting out of a strategic role in a vital part of our primary health care services.

The Government have not offered any criticism of the way in which the GPFC has worked in the past. There is only one justification for abolishing it. The Minister talked about reducing public spending. The GPFC does not involve public spending. It breaks even or makes a profit. It does count against the public sector borrowing requirement, but only to the tune of one thousandth of 1 per cent.

Therefore, we are against the new clause that would abolish the General Practice Finance Corporation. We are concerned that the Government have tabled the new clauses without any consultation. The new clauses do not deal with the main problems of clauses 1 to 3. Therefore, we cannot support them.

Mrs. Currie: On the point about consultation, I am sure that if the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) were to read the amendments which, as she rightly says, are quite technical, she would realise that some have been drawn up directly in response to comments made in Committee by herself and her hon. Friends. We are concerned to ensure that the Treasury guarantee should continue during the period of transition. That was one point that was raised. I am sure that if we consulted almost everybody about whether there should be a new tax liability, which we had not realised might exist, their response would be that we should go ahead in bringing forward the amendments, which we have done.

I am sorry that the hon. Lady has not seen the GPFC annual report. It was published on 29 March 1988, which is now more than a fortnight ago. I shall ensure that a spare copy is at the back of the Chair for her so that she can read it in her own good time. It is really quite interesting. Much of what the hon. Lady has said—*[Interruption.]* There is a copy in the Library.

The hon. Lady will know from the long discussions that we had in Committee that we agree about the conditions of some GPs' premises. Indeed, we are trying to extend the provisions to dentists' premises, as there is room for improvement. We share her concern about premises not being accessible to disabled people. We also share her concern that some GPs do not always help equip their premises as they should.

In the remarks that she has just made, and possibly in Committee, the hon. Lady has shown a degree of confusion in her mind between the role of the GPFC and that of family practitioner committees. It is the job of the family practitioner committee to do all of the things that she has said. It has the powers to do so and we expect it to use those powers. Indeed, it could go so far as to withhold payments for rent and rates from premises that are not suitable. The GPFC does not have the role that the hon. Lady has identified. I think that she wanted a strategic planning organisation, that is the family practitioner committee.

The new clause satisfied some of the points that were made to us in Committee. Therefore, we are endeavouring to ensure that the handover to the private sector is as smooth as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 13

STATUTORY ACCOUNTS OF THE SUCCESSOR COMPANY

'(1) For the purposes of any statutory accounts of the successor company—

(a) the vesting effected by virtue of section 1 above—

(i) shall be taken to have been a vesting of all the property, rights and liabilities (other than any excepted property, rights and liabilities) to which the Corporation was entitled or subject immediately before the end of the last complete financial year ending before the vesting effected by virtue of section 1 above; and

(ii) shall be taken to have been effected immediately after the end of that year; and

(b) the value of any asset and the amount of any liability of the Corporation taken to have been vested in the successor company by virtue of paragraph (a) above shall be taken to be the value or (as the case may be) the amount assigned to that asset or liability for the purposes of the corresponding statement of accounts prepared by the Corporation in respect of that year in pursuance of section 8 of the National Health Service Act 1966.

(2) For the purposes of any statutory accounts of the successor company the amount to be included in respect of any item shall be determined as if anything done by the Corporation (whether by way of acquiring, revaluing or disposing of any asset or incurring, revaluing or discharging any liability, or by carrying any amount to any provision or reserve, or otherwise) had been done by the successor company.

Accordingly (but without prejudice to the generality of the preceding provision) the amount to be included from time to time in any reserves of the successor company as representing its accumulated realised profits shall be determined as if any profits realised and retained by the corporation had been realised and retained by the successor company.

(3) References in this section to the statutory accounts of the successor company are references to any accounts prepared by the successor company for the purposes of any provision of the Companies Act 1985; and in this section "complete financial year" means a financial year ending with 31st March.'.—*[Mrs. Currie.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 14

CORPORATION TAX

'(1) Subject to subsection (2) below, if on the day specified under section 1(1) above the successor company is a company limited by shares which is wholly owned by the Crown, it shall be treated for all purposes of corporation tax as if it were the same person as the Corporation.

(2) The successor company shall not by virtue of subsection (1) above be regarded as a body falling within section 272(5) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1970 (bodies established for carrying on industries or undertakings under national ownership or control).'.—*[Mrs. Currie.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 15

SIGHT-TESTING

'The following section shall be inserted after section 20A of the Opticians Act 1958—

"*Duties to be performed on sight-testing*

20B.—(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations provide that, subject to any exceptions specified in the regulations, when a registered medical practitioner or registered ophthalmic optician tests the sight of another person, it shall be his duty—

(a) to perform such examinations of the eye for the purpose of detecting injury, disease or abnormality in the eye or elsewhere as the regulations may require, and

(b) immediately following the test to give the person whose sight he has tested a written statement—

(i) that he has carried out the examination that the regulations require, and

(ii) that he is or (as the case may be) is not referring him to a registered medical practitioner.

(2) Except in circumstances specified in regulations under subsection (3)(b) of this section, it shall also be his duty to give the person whose sight he has tested, immediately following the test, either a signed, written prescription for an optical appliance or a signed, written statement that he does not need to wear or use an optical appliance.

(3) The Secretary of State may by regulations specify—

(a) particulars to be included in a prescription or statement provided in fulfilment of the duty imposed by subsection (2) of this section; and

(b) circumstances in which that duty does not arise.

(4) A person shall not be required as a condition of having his sight tested—

(a) to undertake to purchase from a specified person any optical appliance the testing of his sight may show he requires to wear or use; or

(b) to pay a fee before the testing is carried out.

(5) A fee shall be payable in a case where a duty arises under this section only if that duty has been fulfilled.

(6) Any term of an agreement for a testing of sight which is inconsistent with this section shall be unenforceable, and any sum paid in respect of a fee otherwise than in pursuance of this section shall be recoverable.

(7) In this section "fee" means any payment in connection—

(a) with testing sight in accordance with regulations under this section;

(b) with fulfilling any duty imposed by this section; or

(c) with the supply of optical appliances.

(8) Any power to make regulations conferred by this section includes power to make different provision for different classes of case and shall be exercisable by statutory instrument, which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.

(9) In the application of this section to Northern Ireland—

(a) for any reference to the Secretary of State there shall be substituted a reference to the Department of Health and Social Services for Northern Ireland;

(b) in subsection (8) of this section, for the words from "statutory instrument" onwards, there shall be substituted the words "statutory rule, which shall be subject to negative resolution within the meaning of section 41(6) of the Interpretation Act (Northern Ireland) 1954".'.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

The Minister for Health (Mr. Tony Newton): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this it will be convenient to consider Government amendments Nos. 35 to 37.

Mr. Newton: New clause 15 replaces and, as we believe, improves upon, the existing clause 11. It is essentially a consumer protection provision, which commands support quite independently of the proposals in clause 10, which we shall come to at a later stage, concerning eligibility for NHS sight tests.

For the most part, the new clause repeats the requirement of the original clause—principally that, following any sight test, the practitioner must give the patient a written prescription or a written statement that there is no need for glasses; that it must not be a condition of carrying out the test that any spectacles required must be bought from any particular person; and that in any case where a fee is to be charged it must not be levied in advance of the test being performed and will not be enforceable if the duties laid on the practitioner have not been properly carried out.

There are two differences from the present clause 11. First, new clause 15 incorporates an additional requirement for the patient to be told in writing whether he is being referred to a doctor. The second difference, which is the reason we have a new clause, rather than merely an amendment, is that we have decided that it is right to take the power, which curiously does not exist at present, to specify clearly in regulations what duties a practitioner must perform as part of a sight test.

As the House is aware, the sight test is generally understood and expected to include a test to establish

whether spectacles are required, and an eye examination in which signs of injury, disease or abnormality can be detected, leading perhaps to a need for onward referral. However, that does not rest on any specific statutory requirement. A current service committee case—concerning an NHS test, of course—has raised doubts about whether a practitioner is under any obligation to carry out an eye examination, as distinct from simply determining whether spectacles are needed. Therefore, subsection 1(a) is intended to provide the regulation-making powers to enable us to put the matter beyond doubt.

It is our intention that, under whatever arrangements people receive a sight test, there should be certainty about what they are getting and that it should include a proper eye examination. Of course we shall consult the professions when we come to draw up the relevant regulations. However, I can assure them that our general aim will not be to create so rigid a set of rules as to constrain the proper exercise of their professional judgment, but simply to maintain the existing arrangements, which have generally worked satisfactorily for patients and practitioners under the NHS.

I believe that the proposals to legislate in this way will be welcomed by the optical professions. They will put beyond doubt the requirements on them in relation to the sight test. Moreover, they will confirm the practitioners' primary care role in carrying out the eye examination on patients who present themselves and referring for further medical investigation or treatment cases where an abnormality is detected.

The associated Government amendments No. 35 to 37 do no more than eliminate the existing clause 11 to allow for the replacement and make a couple of consequential drafting changes.

I hope that on that basis the House will agree that the new clause is desirable and beneficial, and will agree to its incorporation into the Bill.

7.30 pm

Ms. Harman: Perhaps I may mention at this stage that obviously we are not dealing here with the highly contentious abolition of the free sight test under the National Health Service, which we shall reach later.

The professional organisations have asked me to raise with the Minister some technical points. If he does not feel that they have been covered by what he has said, perhaps he will add something about them. The British Medical Association ophthalmic group committee thinks that the present arrangements are satisfactory because they require opticians to refer patients to their general practitioners if there are any signs of injury, disease or any other abnormality in the eye, or if a satisfactory standard of vision is not attained, even with corrective lenses. The committee says:

"These regulations have been and remain adequate to protect the public. The wording of paragraph 20B(1)(a) may be contrary to its intent and undermine that protection."

There is also concern in the Association of Optometrists. Echoing the BMA view, it says:

"there is a clear legal duty, which is not disputed by the Government, to refer any patient in whose eyes a practitioner sees signs of injury or disease. That duty is apparent as a consequence of Rules made by the General Optical Council under the provisions of the Opticians Act 1958.

We would, therefore, very much like to know why the Secretary of State feels it is necessary to have the provisions in (1)(b)(i) and (ii)."

Perhaps the Minister could address himself in more detail to why he thinks that the current regulations do not satisfactorily protect the consumer so that there may be wider understanding about the matter.

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): I wish to commend my right hon. Friend on the changes that he has proposed. It is important that the person who is carrying out the test shall be reminded not only of his obligation in conditions which may in future be much more competitive but that it is his job to test not just for glasses, but for the eye health of the patient.

Secondly, it is important that the patient should also be reminded that when he or she goes to have his or her eyes tested, the test is not merely to determine whether the person needs a pair of spectacles or stronger lenses but that, as a result of the test, the optician should give the patient a statement on any eye condition that is present. The patient must be aware of his or her rights.

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): There is an interesting principle involved in what is inherent in subsection (1)(a), namely, beginning to define the necessary obligations and form of practice for a doctor or other professional. It is a principle which is becoming more and more dominant in specifying how a patient is examined and what is involved in an ophthalmological or ophthalmoscopic examination. That is a principle on which I have as yet undetermined views, unusually for me.

Subsection (3)(a) deals with the prescription. Subsection (3)(b) refers to the

"circumstances in which that duty does not arise."

Can the Minister say in what circumstances he envisages that it would not arise that a patient who had had an eye examination, a sight test or whatever we wish to call it, would not necessarily be given a prescription?

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): I want to draw the Minister's attention to an issue which we shall not be able to debate today. When I saw the new clause, it seemed to be an improvement on the previous clause, but I thought that it might be improved further. One improvement would be to provide that a patient or, where appropriate, a parent or other representative understands the contents of the written statement, because some people might not understand what they were being offered.

Unfortunately, a gremlin appears to have attacked the administrative works and an amendment in these terms has been printed as though it applied to the original clause 11 and not to the new clause. This will be raised in another place but I trust that the Government will take note of the point.

Mr. Newton: I observe, in passing, the inaccuracy of the initial remarks of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) about the abolition of the free NHS sight test. Under any proposal that we have put forward there will continue to be a substantial number of free sight tests. Indeed, about one third of the population will continue to be entitled to free NHS sight tests under the proposals that the Government have put forward. That falls a long way short of abolition. I do not wish to make an issue of the point, but I did not think that the hon. Lady should be allowed to get away with slipping the reference in as an aside at the beginning of her remarks.

As to the points which were brought to the hon. Lady's attention by the BMA ophthalmic group committee and the Association of Optometrists, the point at issue is not

[Mr. Newton]

whether there is a duty to refer patients to their GP—the point on which her comments seemed to concentrate—but whether there is a duty to conduct an eye examination of the kind that might lead to referral to a GP.

I am more than prepared to consider any further representations that the hon. Lady or those bodies make if they have genuine concerns about the import of the proposals that we have brought forward. I can only repeat that the reason for the proposal, whatever views might be held about the nature of the existing law by those bodies, is that a service committee case concerning the carrying out of a sight test under the existing provisions has raised real doubts about whether there is a duty to carry out an eye examination. We do not want that doubt to continue. Therefore, we are seeking powers to eliminate the doubt by means of regulations.

I can only acknowledge and welcome what my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) has said. Our purpose is to reinforce these important aspects of the sight test. Of course, the interests of the customer are at one with the interests of the practitioner and what the general body of practitioners will welcome.

I do not care to engage in the debate on grand principle offered to me by the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith), not because I am fearful of principle or debates about principle. On the contrary, they are sometimes easier. However, this has been brought forward by the Government in the best possible pragmatic spirit to achieve what everybody agrees is desirable. It is on that pragmatic principle, if I may put it that way, that I stand.

The answer to the hon. Gentleman's point about the purpose of subsection (3)(b) is that a prescription as such is inappropriate when a patient is referred to a general practitioner or when a sight test is carried out not to establish a need for spectacles but, say, as part of a general health check to establish whether the person needs spectacles for occupational requirements, for example. The subsection is intended to cover a limited number of circumstances. At any rate, I can certainly assure the hon. Gentleman that there is no sinister intent.

The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) raised some issues which, in studying some papers at an earlier stage today, or yesterday, I noted he had sought to raise in an amendment, seeking to establish that a practitioner should have a duty to make the meaning of a piece of paper clear to the person to whom he hands it. There is limited scope for misunderstanding a piece of paper that contains a prescription for spectacles, a statement that spectacles are not required, or a statement that somebody is or is not to be referred to a general practitioner.

I do not find it easy to understand how such a piece of paper can be misunderstood or how there can be some further need to impose on a practitioner a duty to explain such a piece of paper to the ordinary citizen. But if I can be persuaded that there is a genuine problem, of course I shall look at it. On the face of it, there can be few simpler pieces of paper that the citizen is likely to be handed, save only, of course, that he may not understand all the technicalities of a prescription and the way in which it is expressed.

I hope that I have dealt sufficiently with the points that have been raised and that the House will proceed to adopt the new clause.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 1

CERVICAL CYTOLOGY SCREENING

'Each district health authority shall operate a comprehensive computerised call and recall system for cervical cytology screening of all women within the district over 20 years every three years.'.—*[Ms. Harman.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ms. Harman: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Every year, over 2,000 women in this country die of cervical cancer. At least half would be saved if we had a proper, comprehensive computerised call and recall system in operation. Women are still dying of cervical cancer, and, because of the Government's failure to act, they will continue to die. The reason is quite simple. Instead of asking themselves only how much money they can save, the Government ask themselves only how much money they can save. As long ago as 1981, the Government were told by their own expert committee for gynaecological cytology that they should take action. They were told that cervical cancer gives an early warning signal and that that signal can be detected by taking a smear, which is a completely painless procedure, and examining it in a laboratory. If a pre-cancerous cell is discovered, the condition can be treated.

There was nothing tendentious or controversial about the report. Indeed, it appeared at the end of many years of international debate and experience. Despite their rhetoric about preventing ill health, the Government have failed to act on the report's recommendations. The report proposed that each district health authority should set up a computerised scheme and invite women to have smear tests, and that the tests should be repeated at regular intervals. The report firmly stated that it was not good enough simply to urge women voluntarily to come forward for a test. That approach had been tried and had failed, and women were still dying of cervical cancer.

The Government did not act on that advice. It was not that they disagreed with the advice; they just did not follow it up. I am certain that they would never have even begun to act had they not been pushed month by month and year by year, and we still have not got there. What has been achieved stands not at all to the credit of the Government, but to the credit of those outside the Government who have relentlessly campaigned on the issue. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) who, as shadow Health Minister, led the campaign in Parliament.

If a woman asks me whether she should have a smear test or wait until she is called for a test by her local health authority, the best advice that I can give her is, "I do not think that you should wait to be called, because you might be not be called for a further five years and you could be dead before then." If the Minister is honest, she will admit that that is still the best advice. Indeed, I recently saw her on television urging women to put themselves forward for smear tests. Why does she still have to give that advice

seven years after she was told that the Government must set up a call and recall system on a district basis? Sadly, the answer is because the scheme is only just starting.

7.45 pm

After the Government's announcement last year that they intended to require district health authorities to set up a call and recall scheme, I became concerned that, for the sake of political advantage, the Minister might announce to the nation that the cervical cancer problem had been solved and that no one need worry about it any more.

To check whether the problem had been solved, staff in my office and I telephoned every district health authority which, according to the Government, was due to set up a computerised call and recall scheme between March 1987 and the end of March this year. There were 83 of them. The survey was based on speaking to each district health authority about what was happening in its area. The survey showed that by the end of 1993, 36 per cent. of the districts will not have called all women between the ages of 20 and 65 years for their first smear test. That means that, 12 years after the Government's expert committee's report was published, there will still be women who have never had or even been called for a smear test.

The very least that the Government can do is to accept the new clause and agree that, up to and possibly beyond 1993, their failure to act will result in the unnecessary death of women from cervical cancer. The Government's failure to act is directly attributable to their obsessional opposition to public spending and to the Health Service. There can be no other explanation for their failure to act on such clear medical advice.

In 1981, when the Government were told that there was conclusive evidence that cervical cancer could be detected and prevented, they should have jumped at the chance to save lives, but, perversely, they are the enemy of medical advance and the opponent of new life-saving treatment. They see them only as extra demands on the Health Service. As well as being morally bankrupt, that approach is a false economy. The British Society of Clinical Cytology estimates that it costs £30 million a year to nurse and treat the 2,000 women who die from cervical cancer, to say nothing of the financial support that is needed for the children whom they leave behind.

All is not well even where computerised call and recall systems are in operation. The Government have failed to ensure proper laboratory services to back up the schemes that are being set up. National Health Service laboratories are finding it hard to recruit staff because the pay does not compete with private sector pay. I shall refer to two districts, although the picture is the same throughout the country.

A report to the Oxfordshire health authority on laboratory work loads states:

"During this financial year there were no suitable applicants for the . . . vacant post. The inability to fill the vacancy is due to lack of applicants with suitable training. Trained people are rare on the job market and if they exist they find it difficult to move to Oxford because of house prices."

It goes on to state:

"Two other vacancies have been filled by trained MLSOs who do not have cytology experience. These two people are being trained by experienced MLSOs hence cutting down on the productivity of the latter."

In the Bloomsbury district health authority last year, five out of 11 laboratory posts were vacant. It is worrying that the Government are so unconcerned that they do not even know the full level of laboratory vacancies throughout the country. I hope that they will not once again leave it to us to do a survey of all laboratories to show the full national picture of vacancies. The Government must take action.

The problem is that the Government are trying to provide the service on the cheap, and laboratory staff are voting with their feet. This means that the more women are called for a smear, the longer they will have to wait for the results to be sent back to their doctors. In a parliamentary answer to me, the Government acknowledged that already 53 districts—more than one fifth of the country as a whole—are taking one month or longer to send the results of smear tests back to women's doctors.

This means that at least one fifth of the districts are already failing to achieve the targets set down in the Government's own guidelines for the turnround time on smear tests. I urge the Minister to find out how many vacant posts there are in the laboratories and to ensure that the pay is increased so that this responsible job becomes attractive and the Health Service can compete with the private sector.

Let me ask the Minister two specific questions relating to the inaccurate diagnosis as negative of smear tests at the women's hospital in Liverpool between 1983 and 1985. That occurred because of what was later officially described in a report as

"a massive error of professional judgment".

First, will the Minister tell us whether compensation has been assessed and paid to those women who went on to develop invasive and untreatable cervical cancer as a result? Secondly, I should like the Government to report to us on the progress of the national quality control checks on smears—a procedure that was revised after the Liverpool episode.

Will the Minister require health authorities to recall women at three-year intervals? In the past, the Government have not been very good at taking expert medical advice, even when it has been unanimous. They have failed in that respect on this issue. Here is another opportunity for them to take the advice of medical experts. Medical opinion, including the opinion of the British Medical Association, is now unanimous that women must be tested every three years, and not just every five years. A report of the inter-collegiate working part on cervical cytology screening, conducted by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of Pathologists, the Royal College of General Practitioners and the Faculty of Community Medicine backs up the argument that the interval between tests should be three years.

In Oxford it was assessed that to leave the test for five years would be

"bad medicine, especially when disease prevention is a priority. It would result in twice the number of invasive cancers of the cervix in this District."

I should hate the Government to respond to the problems in the laboratories and the district health authorities by simply saying, "We will leave the interval at five years." The Government should take the issue seriously. They should make sure that they sort out the problems in the laboratories, and they should require district health authorities to screen women every three years.

The Government must also ensure that district health authorities, family practitioner committees and general practitioners have enough resources to run the schemes

[Ms. Harman]

successfully. We do not want to find that in two years' time district health authorities are having to make difficult decisions about whether to keep their cervical cancer screening programmes or to make cuts in some other life-saving services.

Will the Minister set up a national advertising programme to encourage women to go for tests, because we are concerned about the take-up rate? Even for the schemes that have been going for some time it is difficult to know what the take-up rate is because there have been problems with the computer software which the Government have not ironed out. There is not a great deal of hard evidence about the take-up rate, but we suspect that it is lower than it should be.

We know that the take-up rate for cervical cancer tests would be greatly improved by a television advertising campaign. A letter calling a woman for a smear test would have more effect if, before it dropped on her mat, she had seen advertisements on the television explaining the importance of responding to the call and going for a test. The Department of Trade and Industry has recently spent £5·6 million on its television advertising campaign on the so-called enterprise initiative. It seems to me that if the DTI can spend that sort of money on advertising a bogus initiative, it is well worth the Department of Health and Social Security spending money on an advertising campaign that would actually save women's lives.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (Norfolk, South-West): I think that I am right in saying that all family practitioner committees had computers installed for call and recall as long ago as February and that all of them now have the complete age/sex registers on computer.

I have a particular interest in this matter because before entering this House I was chairman of a health authority which had its computerised call and recall system in place last June. It seems to me that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) has painted an unnecessarily gloomy picture. We are one of the few countries that now has a fully computerised and comprehensive call and recall system, and only an impractical person would imagine that such a system, which has involved many, many hours of personnel input, could possibly work instantly, correctly and perfectly—as we all hope it will—within a few short weeks.

I know from practical experience that in my own health authority it took some time for the gremlins described by the hon. Member for Peckham to be smoothed out of the computer. Earlier, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health said that we were talking about pragmatism and principles. The principle has been recognised and is in place, but pragmatically we have to wait to be sure that it is working effectively everywhere.

Obviously, all hon. Members have every sympathy with the aim of the new clause in reducing screening time to three years. However, I know from practical experience that if we pile task upon task on GPs, family practitioner committees and health authorities, we severely risk losing the advantage that we have gained in having installed the system already. If we overload the system now, before the initial difficulties are smoothed out, we shall not be able to respond to the needs of women in this very important area of preventive health care.

I quite agree that one of our first aims must be to raise the consciousness of women about the importance of cervical cancer and I am sure that all of us, as Members of Parliament, are busy doing just that. However, I am not sure about the effectiveness of a television campaign. Most people are perfectly capable of responding to an invitation that falls on their doormat; I am sure that my constituents are. The important point is that the principle has been recognised and the machinery is in place. As I said before, we are one of the few countries that has recognised the importance of having such a system and is carrying out the work and I strongly urge that we should not overload the system so that we lose the advantage that the Government have put in place for all women.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): It cannot be said too often that cervical cancer killed 2,000 women last year. This killer disease can and should be eradicated, but how many health authorities are experiencing the problems that we have in North Staffordshire?

On 21 January, I wrote to the Minister about a women who had had a smear done on 15 September last year but who had received the results on 6 January this year; she had waited 16 weeks. Unfortunately, that lady had an abnormality that required immediate treatment, but she had had to wait 16 weeks. On 10 February, I had a letter from the Minister saying that the waiting time in north Staffordshire was between 10 and 12 weeks. On 16 February, I had a letter from the community physician for north Staffordshire saying that the waiting time was eight weeks.

On 19 February, I had a letter from the district health authority chairman saying that the waiting time was now eight weeks in North Staffordshire. There had been problems with maternity leave and sickness but the tests were now being sent to other pathology laboratories and the waiting time was down to eight weeks. On 24 February, I had a letter from a lady who had had her test on 15 October and whose results were returned on 18 February. That was 18 weeks waiting time. She said that she had never felt so depressed about anything in her life, and that week after week she had worried herself silly.

On 8 March, the Minister replied to me and claimed in her letter that the waiting time was eight weeks in north Staffordshire. On 25 March, I received my smear test result, almost 11 weeks after I had had the test. Meanwhile, I have had a letter from the chairman of the family practitioner committee which said that the committee was considering abandoning all tests in north Staffordshire for four weeks because it could not cope.

For some time, north Staffordshire has had a call and recall system. Like the hon. Member for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard) I served on a district health authority when this system was installed. It is a good system but what comfort is it to the women of north Staffordshire when the family practitioner committee says that it cannot use its expensive life-saving system because it cannot cope? What comfort has the Minister to offer the people of north Staffordshire?

8 pm

Mr. Peter Griffiths: I am sure that we have all listened with concern and perhaps shock to the speech of the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding). I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will take note of what has been said. The House resolving to reduce the

period of recall under a computerised system would not alter by one jot the situation that the hon. Lady had described. The position would not be improved by the new clause.

We need a far more personal approach to testing and re-testing. I wished to intervene in the speech by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) to say that, no matter how efficient a computerised recall system may be, there will always be those who, because of moving from one place to another or because of living in houses in multi-occupation, do not receive the regular postcard recalls. It is important to seek to place the responsibility firmly on women to ensure that it is their task to seek the important advice that they can get from testing.

Mr. Galbraith: How can that be done?

Mr. Griffiths: I am about to make some suggestions about that, and I can do so without the hon. Gentleman's help.

No hon. Member has mentioned an approach to women who are at the receptive age young women at school or at college. That is the time at which young girls should have drawn to their attention the fact that these tests are not carried out just once or that at some time in the future they ought to seek them, but that it is a process in which they have a personal responsibility for their own health and well-being in the years to come. A campaign directed at sixth forms and colleges would be perhaps the most effective way of setting in train the responsible attitude that we wish to see.

Because of age and lifestyle, some women are acknowledged to be particularly at risk, and they should be reminded of their responsibility. If they move from one part of the country to another and then move on again, they should not wait for the system to catch up but should seek treatment. The weakness of the new clause is exemplified by the attitude of some Opposition Members who interrupted me when I suggested that we should ask women to help themselves. The idea that we can rely on a computerised system is quite wrong. The primary responsibility for health care rests with the individual, and we should start to inculcate that feeling in schools and colleges.

Ms. Ruddock: I support the new clause moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), with whom I share a local district health authority. I commend to the House the practice of that health authority, Lewisham and North Southwark. It takes the view that the greatest public interest and the specific health interest of women can be served only by having a call and recall system with a three-year interval for women between the ages of 20 and 65. That is the scheme that the authority has put in train. It is one of the health authority districts that was able to meet the Minister's deadline, and it sent out its first call list by 31 March. It was able to do that only because of the extreme dedication of the staff who are pioneering the scheme and who carried out all the work prior to the Government bringing in the legislation.

Having decided to carry out the scheme, the authority found, as all health authorities will find, that there are constraints on finance and personnel. Let us first examine the financial constraints. The simple smear test will not in itself save the lives of women. It must be backed by expert colposcopy if we are to take advantage of the best medical practice. In Lewisham and North Southwark, there was until recently a five-month delay for colposcopy. I hope that Conservative Members will note that that means that women who are told that the smear is abnormal will wait in absolute terror until they are called for the vital further work that will confirm whether the abnormality is trivial or signals terminal illness.

The provision of colposcopy services has not been adequately dealt with to enable it to match the simple smear test and the call and recall provisions. For Lewisham and North Southwark district health authority to deal with that problem and to reduce the five-month delay to one month, which is its target, and to deal adequately with the only 40 per cent. response that it expects from the call-in system, it has had to find £27,000 in capital and an extra £13,000 in revenue.

The Government have not provided that money. It has had to be found by taking money from one part of the budget to fund another part. In order to fund the system, other parts of the Health Service in Lewisham and North Southwark have had to be cut. No woman and, I hope, no man who wants to see this life-saving system in operation wants to see it instituted at the expense of other parts of the much needed Health Service.

Will the Minister confirm that at the moment category one carcinoma in situ is not being subjected to colposcopy examination? I understand that that is the case in Lewisham and North Southwark, although the authority believes that the ideal and best clinical practice demands that such conditions are properly investigated. It would be extremely serious if the scheme for encouraging women to come forward for testing were to be inadequate so that pre-cancerous stages were not subjected to the best possible clinical investigation.

Finally, I turn to the question of technicians. As my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham said, there is a shortage of medical laboratory scientific officers. My district health authority is aware of this and is enthusiastic about recruiting trained people. The authority has told me that when it advertises it receives no applications from that category of health worker. It is partly to do with the fact that wages are so low but it is also because there are far too few people with adequate training. The health authority is in a position to offer skilled people to provide training. It would like to have training on a regional basis, but, of course, again there is no provision and there would be no funding unless it stole money from some other part of the budget.

I ask the Minister to tell us whether any advice is being given to general practitioners about spatulas. As has been said, there is far too high a rate of false negatives. We should like to know whether that could be improved, as some of the literature suggests, by encouraging GPs to cease using the Ayre spatula and to use the Aylesbury or some other spatula. Clearly it is in all our interests that, once women are in the computerised system, they should not be misled, especially when there are ways in which we could improve the accuracy of the diagnosis.

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): I must apologise to hon. Members for coming to the debate late. I was chairing a Committee upstairs and I came as soon as I could. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on this subject.

I am aghast that there can be any question of Government Members opposing the new clause. Screening for cervical cancer is the epitome of a preventive medical technique. In the whole sphere of cancers, it is the only

[Dr. Lewis Moonie]

occasion on which we can find a pre-cancerous lesion and treat it successfully in every case. Therefore, it is mandatory for us to use the techniques that are available to maximise a woman's chance of benefiting from such a technique. I know of no medical opinion anywhere in the world that would recommend anything other than a three-yearly period for screening. If the Minister can offer any other informed evidence on the subject, I would be only too glad to receive it. The economic and medical case is unanswerable. It saves lives and, in the long run, it saves money because the treatment of women who develop cancer is an expensive business.

As I have said, it is a preventive medical technique and that means that we must encourage women, if possible, to take advantage of it. We can do that by three methods. The standard procedure in health education is to inform women, to increase their knowledge and hopefully to modify their attitudes. Through doing that we can hope to change their behaviour. It is always easy to inform people about a technique, but it is much more difficult to change their attitude and much more difficult still to change their behaviour.

We are talking about two groups of women. We are talking about a group who will benefit from screening of any sort; those who will respond to the request to come for screening. That group includes the majority of women about whom we are talking. Sadly, there is another group who do not respond to any form of call by letter for many reasons.

In my area in Fife, one of my former colleagues has conducted extensive research on the subject of women's attitudes to screening and the things that modify their take-up of it. For example, the availability of screening, when they can go, facilities for looking after children and whether they can attend when they are at work all play a key role. Perhaps most important is the issue whether they can have a woman doctor to carry out the technique. That is very important for many women, particularly older women.

Not only do we need an efficient system for those who will take advantage of it; we need to conduct research into modifying general behaviour. We must not rely on the individual's behaviour alone. Appeals to individual behaviour do not work and that is why I oppose them. I notice that the Minister agrees with that.

Even if every woman on the average GP list were to respond to the call—let us say there are 800, and that is an overestimate—screening every three years instead of every five would mean a difference of less than two cases per GP per week. That is taking no account of the fact that half of the women may be attending a community health clinic anyway. That is not an overwhelming burden of work for a GP, and it is wrong to suggest that it is. It is something with which they could easily cope. I commend the new clause to the House and I hope that it will be passed.

8.15 pm

Mr. Galbraith: I want to respond to the comments by the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths). I do not disagree with him, but I want to develop what he said. He said that the way forward is for people to look after their health and that it is all about taking a cold shower in the morning, going for a run, and so on. Those methods are favoured by the Minister. He said that each individual has responsibility for his or her health, and we accept that. However, on top of that is another important layer and that is what is involved in the new clause.

There should be a suitable call and recall system to ensure that as many women as possible have the test. That is what it is all about. We are not talking about removing responsibility. There will always be people who will accept responsibility for themselves, but, as I have said, there is another layer.

I want to re-emphasise what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie). As he said, the systems involved in the technique are curative. Other systems of screening for cancer, such as chest X-rays, barium meals, and so on, can detect a cancer which may be excised, thereby preventing complications. However, that is less than curative. This type of screening detects a pre-cancerous condition, which, if dealt with, can be cured and cancer does not develop. That is the important difference and that is the importance of the new clause. That is why we are asking all hon. Members to support it.

Mrs. Rosie Barnes (Greenwich): I want to add my weight to the request for a proper review of laboratory technicians, their career structure and pay levels. It is a severe problem in my area and it may well be more responsible than any other single factor for the delays in women receiving a response to a test that they may have had some weeks or months previously.

I was approached recently by a dedicated laboratory technician who had been in her present location for many years. She said that on average once every two months she is offered a job in the private sector for about double her current salary. She is dedicated and is staying in the NHS but is seeing staff leave at a considerable rate. That problem needs to be resolved.

Advertising has already been mentioned tonight and a call has been made for an advertising campaign to be used to draw attention to the value of responding to the system. I find it intriguing that whenever a call is made for advertising in a matter such as this we hear streams of advice about how advertising is not really effective. I do not find that argument convincing. We all know that the private sector spends millions of pounds. It conducts research on its advertising and its effects and it does that because it works. It would work just as effectively in this area in encouraging women to come forward.

We all know that women who read the medical pages in newspapers, watch television programmes and perhaps listen to the valuable work that "Woman's Hour" on Radio 4 has been doing, are likely to be influenced and to come forward. However, there are women who watch television between 7 and 8 pm who are not listening to those programmes or reading the articles, but whose lives may be saved by triggering them into attending. I recommend that that be given serious consideration.

Mrs. Currie: This has been an interesting short debate, and I am particularly grateful for the comments made by my hon. Friends the Members for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) and for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard). We share the views expressed on both sides of the House about the possibility of saving lives by the mass screening of adult women for cervical cancer. Opposition Members know that I mean that.

The major killer of women before their time in this country is not cervical cancer but breast cancer. As hon. Members know, we are developing a full breast cancer screening programme throughout the country, and we shall be the first major country to have such a system. The next largest killer of women before their time is lung cancer. Indeed, in Scotland, it is the biggest killer. Hon. Members know my views about that subject, and I hope that they share them.

Cervical cancer is significant, because most deaths from it are unnecessary. In its treatable, pre-cancerous phase, which may last 10 years or more, it is symptomless, and the simple, cheap way to find it is the smear test, which has been available for nearly 25 years. If it is not detected in time it kills, and the number of deaths from it stand at 2,000 per year, although the figure has been dropping slowly over the past decade.

For many years, the number of cases of invasive cancer has been about 4,000 per year. If we had not reached those ladies in the way that we have, the death rate would have been much higher. However, our concern continues, because the majority of deaths are among older women who have never been screened and perhaps have not visited their doctor for many years. An opportunistic system, which is the system which has operated in other countries, simply will not do.

We agree with the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) that we need a systematic mass screening service for which all women receive invitations to attend. Our other major concern, which the hon. Lady did not mention, is that there is a new, more aggressive form of cancer appearing in small numbers among younger women. It is relatively rare and may be linked to a virus. Changes in behaviour may assist in preventing its further spread, and links with the increasing smoking behaviour of young women have been implied. That is why the practice that has been extant for more than 20 years of concentrating attention on older women is not enough. Of course large numbers of younger women are tested already —for example, when receiving contraceptive advice—but the bulk of the 4 million tests that are currently being carried out are on younger women.

I listened to the hon. Member for Peckham with great interest. I have read the articles that she has written. There was one in the *Morning Star* this week. For the past few weeks she has been saying that I am wrong in saying that the system is about to be up and running. When people say that I am wrong there are three possibilities: they are right —occasionally that happens—they are being mischievous or they are dim. The hon. Lady is not right, she does not look like the sort to cause trouble, so I am left with the third conclusion—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Lady will listen, I shall explain why the thought keeps flicking into my head that perhaps she is being a bit dim about this matter.

For over 20 years, Governments have been trying to introduce a comprehensive screening system for precisely the reasons that the hon. Member for Peckham has given, which I endorse. The new clause asks us to introduce a new system, but that is unnecessary because we have already done so. In 1966, the Labour Government said that GPs should be responsible for screening, and they offered incentives for them to do so, and we have continued that system. However, that did not work because the take-up was poor.

In 1971, the Conservative Government tried to set up a national recall system based in Southport using manual records. Given the complexity of the task, we should not be too surprised that it did not succeed.

In 1981, the Government decided that the system would work better at local level. Many highly successful screening services were set up following the 1981 initiative, such as the one in Cambridge, and there are some excellent, long-established services in Scotland that have been well-researched and written up.

By 1985 it was apparent that having a variety of schemes—some manual, others using computers and some having different software—was fine in areas that were well organised and enthusiastic, but they left out large parts of the country, often parts where cervical cancer was a problem. In 1985, my right hon. and learned Friend who is now the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster decided that we should move to a call and recall system, consistent throughout England, so that all women could have a chance of accepting an invitation to be screened.

The computer implementation programme was carried out between December 1985 and February 1988. Originally, it was scheduled to take a full three years. It has cost £10 million, involved installing computers at 65 different sites, providing more than 750 VDU terminals for the family practitioner committee staff, and converted over 33 million clerical records. It has been a massive exercise. The entire family practitioner system has been computerised, offering many exciting opportunities for prevention of disease in the future.

No one has said what I am about to say. We should all thank and congratulate everybody concerned in that major exercise. It has involved an enormous amount of work not,—just as the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) said, some years ago, but in recent weeks and months as well.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): The Minister says that in 1985, with some burst of insight, the Government decided that schemes should be implemented. Will she say why, with computerised call and recall systems, national standards and national publicity having been recommended in every part of the country since 1981, the Government did not do a damn thing until 1985?

Mrs. Currie: The hon. Gentleman is fairly typical of Socialists in this country. He is interested only in what happened in the past. We are interested in what is happening now.

We have completed the computer implementation programme six weeks ahead of schedule. As a result, every English family practitioner committee has a computerised register, and all but nine of the 190 district health authorities have screening systems under way. The rest, which are mainly in one Thames region, will be no more than four weeks behind. We are the only country within the European Community with such a comprehensive programme, and this achievement puts us ahead of all the major nations.

France, Italy and even West Germany, which has a much higher spend on health than ourselves, have no nationwide service, and only 30 per cent. of at-risk women are screened in West Germany. Further, America, Spain and Holland do not have such a system. In the western world only Sweden, Finland and tiny Iceland have a

[Mrs. Currie]

similar system. It is time that Opposition Members recognised that we have such a system. They should say, "Well done, and congratulations to all concerned."

It is worth pointing out that some of the areas that are not yet on target, but which will be on target within the next few weeks, have had a screening system for some time. Inevitably, implementation of the system is at different stages in different districts. Some areas have had the system for a long time, some are issuing prior notification lists to GPs, some are concentrating first on a particular age group or a particular number of GP practices and others are undertaking a gradual introduction to check the system, particularly where equipment is newly installed.

On publicity, we do not rule out a national campaign, but all the evidence shows that local efforts are much more effective. There is plenty of evidence, including a recent edition of the *British Medical Journal*, that a sympathetic and personal invitation from the GP produces the best response. We are even advised that the colour of the letter should be pink, as it produces a better response. There will be much local publicity. For example, the northern region is considering a publicity campaign to encourage women to respond to the programme. All 16 districts have been live from 1 April. Yorkshire region tells me that its system is up and running. The system is up and running in Trent region, and it became operative in Leicester on 31 March. Mersey region tells me that it held a press conference earlier this year when all five Cheshire districts started up, thus giving women an opportunity to respond.

It is clear that we should remind people, including GPs, that we are testing for microscopic changes that are rare. If someone is told that she has an abnormal smear, almost certainly it does not mean that she has cancer. It probably means that there was something wrong with the slide or that she has a mild infection. The microscopic changes that lead to cancer are still very rare; the vast majority of slides are clear. The best advice that the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) could give to her constituents is, "Do not worry," and that is entirely right.

Mr. Galbraith: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Currie: No, I do not have time.

European Cancer Week, which will run from the first week of May, will give wide publicity to a 10-point code against cancer. Two of them advise women to be screened for breast and cervical cancer. Therefore, in that particular week and in European Cancer Year—next year—we shall have the opportunity to raise the issue nationally.

Opposition Members raised the question of laboratory backlogs. Those are monitored every month and we chase the small number of district health authorities that have backlogs. The vast majority do not. In north Staffordshire, the average delay at 23 March was confirmed at eight weeks. Some slides from before Christmas have been held back because the health authority wanted to distribute batches of slides to other laboratories, but they will all be dealt with in the usual way. The hon. Member for Peckham should remember what I said earlier. The median times between the time when the very first pre-cancer stages are detectable and the point at which cancer becomes inoperable is 12 years. On that basis, I am sure that the hon. Lady's constituents are being well looked after.

8.30 pm

As for staff shortages in laboratories, the number of screening staff has increased by nearly 12 per cent. between 1985 and 1986—the last year for which I have details. It is worth reflecting on the fact that the total whole-time equivalent of screening staff in England was 778 at 31 December 1987, and during that year the total number of smears taken was 37 million. The Royal College of Pathologists and the British Society of Clinical Cytology recommend that a screener should deal with 7,000 smears a year. I invite Opposition Members to do their sums. Nationally there are sufficient staff. Occasionally there are local problems and, when there are, we chase them.

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Currie: No. I do not have time, because we have a long debate.

The hon. member for Peckham said that it will take five years to screen everyone. Of course it will. If the hon. Lady is seriously suggesting that we call in millions of women next week all at one go, then she is dimmer than I thought, or else she is deliberately attempting to mislead the women of this country. As she is a nice lady on the whole, I do not think that she is doing that. In any case, we need a steady throughput for the laboratories and, where necessary, the treatment centres. The same point has been made to us about the breast cancer programmes.

As for the hon. Lady's statement that some of district health authorities will not be screening, even in five years, I can say categorically that she is wrong. If she has any information to the contrary, I hope that she will tell me which health authorities are involved and I shall deal with them. I make that promise to the House.

I should like briefly to deal with the three-year interval. The new clause would set the recall interval at three years. We have told all health authorities that recall should be at least every five years. That was based on careful consideration of all the clinical and epidemiological data available.

A report by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, which was published in 1986, says that efficient five-yearly screening between the ages of 20 and 64 reduced the chances of a woman developing cervical cancer by 84 per cent. That is our target. It is also the advice which I received recently in Finland, which has had a five-yearly system for many years and has seen a sharp drop in its death rate.

If we were to move to a three-year system, the number of lives that might be saved would be very small. We want to save those lives as well, but, first, we are keen to save the 84 per cent. of lives that are achievable with five-yearly screening. That is our first target. We are already saving lives. We have said to those health authorities which are reaching a high proportion of eligible women regularly that they are free to increase the frequency of the screening, and some of them have chosen to do so. That is why the revised guidance which we issued in January to the health authorities and the family practitioner committees said that recall should be at least every five years.

The hon. Member for Peckham, who I know is interested and concerned about this issue, should reflect on what would happen if we moved to a three-year system before we have achieved a high overall response. The keen women would come again and those women who are at

risk still would not come. That is what would happen. In my judgment, and in the judgment of our medical advisers, that is not the way to proceed.

The hon. Lady is concerned about take-up. So am I. She will see that we have set up the computer system so that we now get much better information on take-up. There has been mention of the quality of smear tests and of the reading of smears. Many of those points have been covered in the recent circular, a copy of which is in the Library.

We are also concerned about the training of staff. The training of staff is being carried forward. The hon. Lady might care to listen to the debate on clause 13 tomorrow for some interesting information.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford asked about spatulas. The Aylesbury spatula is available under the central supply arrangements. The Committee on Gynaecological Cytology will review all the spatulae and the brushes at its next meeting, which is in July. If necessary, the central supply arrangements can be adjusted in the light of its recommendations.

Ms. Harman: The Minister looks as though she is reaching her last page. I do not want her to sit down before she has answered my points about women in Liverpool who have suffered invasive cervical cancer, unless I am too dim to have noticed her reply. Incidentally, the last time the Minister said that I was too young to understand. Now, apparently, I am too dim. I await to hear the next reason why I cannot understand.

Mrs. Currie: All I can say to the hon. Lady is, if the cap fits, wear it.

We understand that some women in the Mersey area have started legal proceedings. Therefore, it would not be appropriate for me to comment at this stage.

Lastly, I should like to say that nobody need wait for the invitation. If a woman has never been screened or has not been screened for more than five years, or if she has any problems such as pain or discharge, she should go to her doctor now. If that eminently good advice were to be followed and if Opposition Members could possibly endorse it, we should save lots of lives.

Ms. Jo Richardson (Barking): I found the Minister's speech, delivered at a rate of knots, so complacent that it was breathtaking. She gave us a lot of interesting information, and I join her in one thing—in congratulating the people who have undertaken the massive job of computerisation. I do not know that they will thank her for her congratulations, because they had no funds with which to do it. They had to find the money by paring funds for other essential services. In the new clause, we are emphasising the fact that the Government have to fund the health authorities to enable them to provide this essential service.

The hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) also took my breath away when he said that the best way to deal with the problem was to let women look after themselves and not to worry about calling them in: at least that seemed to be the import of what he said. I have to tell him that that would not cut the death rate, but would increase it. Women cannot always get the service that they require when they want it, even if they go for it. I think the hon. Gentleman said that students might take advantage of the system. Many health authorities do not screen women before the age of 35.

Mr. Peter Griffiths: I was not suggesting that students need to be tested. My suggestion was that the process of education should begin at school and in college, to remind women of their obligation to supplement the system by their own responsibility.

Ms. Richardson: Obviously I misunderstood the hon. Gentleman slightly. Nevertheless, the point he was making stands—that women should start thinking for themselves. That would be fine if the service was provided in all the regions by the family practitioner committees and if there were well women clinics in every hospital to deal with it. If that were the case, I would accept it.

Our new clause responds to current epidemiological evidence and to the recommendations to the Department of Health and Social Security from the British Medical Association's medical services committee. The BMA says

"that the introduction of an adequately funded cervical cytology programme which offers a cervical smear test to women over the age of 20 at three-yearly intervals, together with adequate follow-up facilities"—

that is very important—

"comparable with those of many other countries, would indicate the determination of the Department of Health to reduce significantly the numbers of deaths each year from cervical cancer."

The Minister has had an opportunity tonight to demonstrate that determination but, sadly for thousands of women, I think that she has shown, despite the information that she has been given, a terrifying complacency that will not satisfy them. From all that has been said, it is clear that the present highly unsatisfactory and, indeed, dangerous, situation is to be allowed to continue.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): My hon. Friend will know that, although strapped for cash, Newham district health authority has made great strides in this respect. To take up my hon. Friend's point about the BMA, has she noted that the Minister said that a three-yearly test would save a few more lives, but that she does not intend to accept our new clause because, although she has not spelt it out, it would cost too much money? If that is not the reason, I hope that my hon. Friend will invite the Minister to get up and say why she does not accept our new clause.

Ms. Richardson: My hon. Friend has made the point. I should be happy for the Minister to intervene and answer him, and I invite her to do so, but the Government are not prepared to fund such a scheme. It is all very well for the Minister and others to say that some lives will be saved in this way, but it will not be all that many. One life is worth saving. We should not fall into the trap of saying that if there are tests for 83 per cent. it does not matter about the remaining 17 per cent.

Arrangements for screening of cervical cancer, which claimed the lives of 2,203 women in 1986, vary widely. The survey carried out by my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) confirmed that, seven years after the recommendation of the Government's own expert committee, lack of money has prevented health authorities from carrying out the committee's advice. More than half the 81 districts due to set up computerised programmes are offering only five-yearly screening. Virtually all are imposing varying upper age limits—from 55 years to 60, 64 or 65 years. Again I refer to what the hon. Member for

[Ms. Richardson]

Portsmouth, North said. If a woman is 56 years old, she might find that she cannot be tested because in her health authority area screening stops at 55.

The Minister recently sent a letter to all Members of Parliament on this topic. What she said in her letter has been exposed by my hon. Friend's survey and by the BMA. I quote again from the BMA, because what it says is very important, and the BMA is usually influential in this House. It said:

"At present arrangements for screening in health authorities vary widely. Some authorities have introduced programmes based on three-yearly intervals, whereas laboratories in others are refusing to accept specimens more frequently than five years. This is confusing for the public and creates difficulties for doctors in their relationships with patients . . . Optional flexibility and lack of clear guidance on the nature of local programmes are guaranteed to make matters worse."

8.45 pm

I recall the 'sisterly warning' that I gave the Minister when she announced her "special responsibility" for women's health. I warned her then that women would not take kindly to sensationalism and publicity stunts in place of well-thought-out policies to improve women's health care. I am pleased that since that time we appear to have won the Minister, at least in word, away from her previously held view—not all that long ago, I remind her—that universal screening was neither desirable or effective. However, in deed, I am sad to say, she has been a sensational flop in securing and directing the resources that are needed for a safe, secure, nationwide call and recall system. She has also, unfortunately, shown a gross insensitivity, in my opinion, to women's well-founded anxieties about some of her pronouncements.

Recently the Minister told women not to "sleep around". I do not think that those were the words she used, but, whatever the words, that is not the way to address the problem. That is no way to speak to women, of any age, about their personal sexual relationships. The Minister grins broadly, but I do not think that women take very kindly to such slighting remarks. The Minister should be aware by now of the fact that no one knows exactly the cause of cervical cancer.

Although there is some evidence to suggest that there may be a connection between a wart virus passed on during sexual intercourse and cervical cancer, or having sex at a very early age or with several partners, the Minister must remember that only a tiny proportion of women who started having sex at a young age, or who have had many partners, develop cervical cancer. Many women who develop cervical cancer have had only one partner.

Such so-called advice is an insult to women and a cheap cover-up by attempting to blame the victims for the Government's abject failure to give a clear lead in providing both the resources and the statutory obligation to provide three-yearly screening on a call and recall basis.

The fact is that 96 per cent. of cases that are caught at the pre-cancer stage are curable by laser treatment. The remainder can be cured by other treatment. I refer to a letter that I received recently from a 29-year-old woman in south Devon. She has been able to have regular smear tests because, as she says, she is articulate and able to insist upon her rights, though she does not know whether that applies to other women in her own region or in other regions. She has had abnormal results which at first were regarded as an infection and treated as such, but a few months ago the problem was classified as dysplasia, pre-cancerous cells.

She was referred to the colposcopy clinic at Torbay hospital and it was confirmed that she should have laser treatment. However, the laser equipment was broken, and it had been broken for some time. She was told by her consultant gynaecologist that there was no prospect of the laser equipment being repaired. That equipment had been donated by the league of friends of the hospital, which had raised the money for it. A trust had been set up to provide money for the maintenance of the laser equipment, but the money has run out.

That young woman wants to know what the Minister intends to do about that equipment. I shall send the Minister that letter, from which she will see that it is a very sad case. If hospitals have to be supplied with laser equipment and other equipment after raising money by jumble sales and coffee mornings, that is not our idea of a National Health Service, and that is not the way to save lives.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I have here a copy of the *West Lancashire Evening Gazette*, in which one of the local journalists talks bravely about her exceedingly successful treatment for cervical cancer. I hope that we are not going to start trading blows. The hon. Lady has cited a problem. I am equally able to cite a success for our system.

Ms. Richardson: I am glad to hear of the hon. Gentleman's success story. I only wish that there were success stories everywhere. I do not say that there are not many of them, but my point is that we must not allow any cases to be failures. It is no good saying that, because we have so many successes, a few failures do not matter. That is not the way to deal with women's lives.

For the Government to plead that they cannot spare more money in the regions for this specific purpose is rubbish. For them to give away £2 billion in tax cuts to the richest—funding them with social security cuts that take £1 billion from the poorest—and then refuse to implement the kind of scheme that we put in is unforgivable.

The Government are constantly crowing that the economy is booming and have shown themselves more than ready to legislate to increase and enforce central Government control where it is neither welcome nor beneficial. Yet they refuse every opportunity to legislate and give a clear commitment and direction where the demand and need for action on cervical cancer screening are glaringly clear.

I invite my hon. Friends, and challenge Conservative Members, to join me in support of new clause 1.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 205, Noes 279.

Division No. 255] **[8.50 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Beckett, Margaret
Allen, Graham	Beggs, Roy
Alton, David	Beith, A. J.
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Bell, Stuart
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Ashton, Joe	Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Bermingham, Gerald
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Bidwell, Sydney
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*	Boateng, Paul

Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alun Michael and
Mr. Allen Adams.

NOES

Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hedges, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*

Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Michael *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, Patrick *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 2

PROVISIONS AS TO MERIT AWARDS

'Consultants holding maximum part-time contracts, and, undertaking private work, shall not be eligible for distinction and meritorious service awards.'.—*[Mr. Robin Cook.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Galbraith: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I am reminded that the hon. Gentleman has not put his name to the new clause. Will an hon. Member whose name is on it please move it formally?

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take new clause 3—*Private work by National Health Service consultants*—

''A consultant holding a whole-time National Health Service contract shall not undertake private work and any consultant who undertakes private work shall be deemed to be holding a part-time contract and his remuneration be adjusted accordingly.'.

Mr. Galbraith: I apologise for that slight technical hitch. It is typical of the inefficiency in some hospital operating theatres.

In speaking to the clause, I do not want to be seen as making an attack on doctors and members of the medical profession, some of whom remain my good friends despite many of the things that I have said about them in the past. It is an attack on certain doctors and, in particular, on some practices in the medical profession that have been encouraged by the Government, particularly in respect of part-time consultants and the abuses of private practice.

I believe that my comments will gain all-party support. I note that even the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) wrote on this matter in the *The Guardian* of 17 February. He said:

"Porters, cooks and cleaners have been obliged to lay their jobs on the line. But in nine years of radical Thatcherism whoever heard of a consultant sacked for inefficiency?"

We shall be talking about merit awards, private practice and efficiency. Opposition Members have been talking about inefficiency for a number of years, but the Government have only recently discovered it. They have discovered it not for its benefits, but as an excuse so that they can say that the problems in the Health Service are the fault of someone else, rather than because they have underfunded the Health Service. They have been looking around for scapegoats.

I wish to speak first about merit awards. They have all-party support. The hon. Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley) asked a question about merit awards. She asked:

"Does the Secretary of State agree that with more than 6,000 merit awards now being paid annually and with the top award being worth more than £27,000, thus virtually doubling a consultant's pay, it is in the interests of the public, the patients and the profession that more information should be readily available? It is time for people to know the by whom,

the to whom, the how and the why of merit awards. That would end the secrecy and suspicion."—[*Official Report*, 10 February 1987; Vol. 110, c.144.]

Opposition Members wish to echo those sentiments and to develop them at this stage.

Merit awards go back to the inception of the Health Service and were set up as a result of the Spens committee, which argued that merit awards were required

"if the recruitment and status of specialist practice are to be maintained, specialists must be able to feel that more than ordinary ability and effort receive an adequate reward"

and that

"any satisfactory system of remuneration must involve differentiation dependent on professional distinction".

Four types of merit awards are given, in addition to the consultant's salary, which currently stands at £32,000 per annum. There is a C merit award of £5,790, a B merit award of £13,000, an A merit award of £22,750 and an A-plus merit award of £29,550, virtually doubling a consultant's salary.

About one third of all consultants receive those awards, but there are two important factors to consider in respect of their distribution. First, very few women receive them. Women are particularly discriminated against because of the nature and secrecy of the committee.

Mr. Robin Cook: That includes my wife.

Mr. Galbraith: I never received a merit award either, when I was working as a consultant.

The merit awards are concentrated on the high-profile, high-tech branches. In my unit, there was a 60 per cent. uptake of merit awards. At one time, 12 out of 14 consultants had a merit award. Cardiothoracic surgery received 50 per cent. of the awards. I was disappointed that, even with my considerable distinction, the committee felt that it could not give me an award at that stage.

The problem is that, in some important specialties which do not have such a high profile, fewer people receive awards. For example, in occupational medicine, only 7 per cent. of the profession receive merit awards. There is a bias against certain specialties in favour of others, depending on the nature of the committee. That bias is inherent in the structure and it is self-perpetuating.

The structure hands out £60 million of taxpayers' money a year, yet we know very little about it. People have asked me about the merit awards system. I have been asked who gives out the awards and I have had to reply that I do not know. I have some vague idea that one or two people may be involved, but I am not sure. I have also been asked who receives the awards, and again I have had to reply that I do not know. Slight changes have been made recently and we can find out from the health board who receives the awards, but it is very difficult for the public to discover what is happening. I have also been asked why people receive the awards and what meritorious work has to be carried out. Again, I have to reply that I do not know. Therefore, £60 million of taxpayers' money is handed out by people we do not know to people we do not know for reasons that are not clear to anyone.

Reasons have been given for the granting of the awards. A statement appears in the *Official Report* on 4 November 1983, stating that the reasons for granting the awards include:

"direct service to patients or their general practitioners, improvement of the service, training and teaching research, medical administration, and clinical or academic distinction. Hard work and outstanding service to the NHS may alone be sufficient reason for an award, particularly at the B and C levels."—[*Official Report*, 4 November 1983; Vol. 47, c. 487.]

Although we may accept that numerous members of the profession who may or may not fulfil the criteria for merit awards actually receive them, we recognise that many people clearly do not deserve the awards. The reason why they have obtained awards, to which they are clearly not entitled, is that the awards are granted by a secretive system run by a small band of men. That is a form of patronage.

I remember that the system was used as a form of patronage. There was always a godfather figure in the region who controlled the system and the money. That medical godfather dispensed patronage. At the end of the day he decided whether someone received a merit award, depending on whether or not that person had been a good boy and supported the various ideas which the godfather wanted to propagate.

The merit awards are given for life. At the age of 40, on a salary of £32,000, someone may receive a top-up award of £11,000 or £12,000 for life. It does not matter whether that someone continues to fulfil the meritorious standards to retain the award. Reform must be made. How can we continue to dispense £60 million of taxpayers' money for life when there is no system of control?

I am not alone in believing that there is need for reform. Many members of the medical profession believe that there should be reform. Most members of the profession agree that the merit award system needs to be reformed, although they may not all necessarily agree on the precise need.

New clause 2 contains our proposals for reforming the merit award system. The awards should be limited to those working full-time for the National Health Service. Only those people perform meritorious work and behave with distinction sufficient to merit the awards. We want the Government to consider our proposal.

The awards were originally granted at the inception of the National Health Service to encourage members of the profession to stay within the NHS and not to practise privately. We want to return to that original reason and ensure that the merit awards are given only to full-timers in the NHS. I know that they are given pro rata to part-timers who fill in, but we want the awards to be granted only to full-timers.

I have the support of Professor David Anderson, the professor of endocrinology at the university of Manchester. He described the system as "patently indefensible". He said:

"We all know consultans who work incredibly hard for the NHS who do not have an award, or only a low-grade one, while others whose commitment is not what it was continue to enjoy higher awards."

Therefore, we are asking the Government to review the merit award system and to accept our new clause, which seeks to ensure that these awards will be made available only to full-time consultants.

9.15 pm

We would also like merit awards to be reviewed every five years. It is incredible that one can be given this large amount, often doubling one's salary, yet it never again comes up for review. It is vital that, if the awards are to be be retained, they should be reviewed every five years.

It is also important—the Minister may wish to reply to this as well—that all those considered for merit awards are

[Mr. Galbraith]

told of this consideration and that, if they do not receive an award, the reason is published. If doctors are failing to improve their standards or are developing their efficiency and doing new things, that would be a useful check. At present one cannot find out whether one has been considered, other than by devious means. It would therefore be an advantage to know whether one was being considered, and, if turned down, to be given the reason why.

New clause 3 deals with the question of private practice in the National Health Service, the contract and the question of full-timers doing private practice. The contract was changed by the Government in 1980. One of the first things that they did was to take the consultant contract from what was full-time and maximum part-time—nine-elevenths—and to give the maximum part-timers ten-elevenths and allow those who worked full-time to do private practice.

We wish to reverse that. We want a full-time consultant to remain a full-time consultant and not be allowed to do private work.

The change in contract was introduced by the Government, who now complain about the amount of private practice done by consultants. Perhaps they may like to reflect on that every time they hold up the consultants as the reason for the problems in the National Health Service. When they introduced the change in 1980, the Government said that it was for the effective functioning of the hospital service that consultants should feel that they were fairly treated and that their contributions were appreciated and adequately valued. In making the offer, the Government sought to translate this into action. The Minister made what was described as "an imaginative gesture" to consultants, clearly believing that its effect upon morale could only redound to the advantage of the National Health Service and its patients.

That was the comment at the time the Government changed the system and allowed full-timers to do private practice. Opposition Members pointed out that consultants would shift their bias towards private practice, to the detriment of the National Health Service, and campaigned against the move. To counter that, the Government decided to introduce six principles—these "paper principles" that no one really believed in and no one bothered about. But we predicted that, even with the principles, the National Health Service would be damaged. No, said the Government. Yet we find that, come the end of last year, the Government once again believe what we say.

Have the Government changed their mind? I read from *The Independent* of 14 December:

"The Downing Street attack came as Mrs. Thatcher, who has a network of Conservative doctors"—

that would not be difficult—

"who brief her independently of official channels, was told last week that hospitals could be 15 to 20 per cent. more efficient if consultants who did private work in NHS time, or spent unnecessary time on committees . . . were brought to heel."

How interesting—the very thing that we were talking about in 1980 when the Government changed the contract. Suddenly we find that the Government agree with what we said then.

On 13 December there was a series of articles in *The Sunday Times*, planted by the Government, developing that theme. On the front page it said:

"Thatcher rounds on top doctors."

There was nothing about remunerating them well or about increased morale reflecting on the Health Service and developing it, as there had been in 1980.

"Thatcher rounds on top doctors."

It sends shivers down my spine.

At the bottom of the article, it talks of

"spending time in Harley Street, 'or wherever', while their clinics and operating lists are looked after by unsupervised junior staff."

Those are the things that Opposition Members talked about and campaigned against for many years. The Government are suddenly agreeing with us. What has happened to cause that change of heart by the Government?

Another theme that has been developed by the National Audit Office is inefficiency in the provision of services. *The Sunday Times* reported:

"Inefficiency played a large part in this because of the inadequate forward planning of admissions"—

"this" is the misuse, the under-use, the 50 per cent. use, of operating theatres—

"lack of coordination between hospital departments, and last-minute cancellations of operations due to the absence of medical staff."

How surprising. Those are the things that we were talking about in 1980, but we were told to go away, that our fears were silly and that such a situation would never happen because doctors could be trusted, being highly professional members of society. I remember being told to stop casting scurrilous slurs on the medical profession. However, suddenly we find:

"Thatcher rounds on top doctors."

What has suddenly happened? Perhaps the Minister will explain it.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): The Public Accounts Committee has considered the report of the National Audit Office on the use of operating theatres. In one district health authority, there was 50 per cent. under-use of operating theatre time, half of which was because of cancellations by anaesthetists and consultants, not because of misallocation or mismanagement, but purely because of those people not turning up or not wishing to carry out those operations. It was suggested in Committee that a possible reason was that they were going down the road to do private work.

Mr. Galbraith: There is no question but that that is the reason. I have experience of many lists being cancelled, not always because of the surgeon, but because of the anaesthetist also. We must include the anaesthetist in the equation. As a junior doctor, I had experience of patients being on the operating table, anaesthetised, waiting for the surgeon to come from a private clinic. That is not unusual.

We predicted all those things when the contract was changed in 1980. We are now seeing them come to fruition, but it is interesting that the Government admit to the problem. They will be keen to accept our new clause 3 so that we can get back to the position that existed before 1980. It is the fact that surgeons perform private work that leads to poor use and inefficiency in the provision of services.

If one is a full-timer, one is always there and available to do things as they arise. One is always there to see the

X-rays as they are produced, and to see the patients. One produces an efficient service by always being there, fitting into slots that become available. However, if one has a private practice commitment, certain sessions are immediately taken up and shifted aside, and it is impossible to be efficient.

Let us consider a parallel. We have a National Health Service in which we allow some doctors to work as private contractors. Let us consider what would happen if we allowed airline pilots to do the same. Let us imagine that we turn up for the British Airways shuttle at London Heathrow, only to find that it has been cancelled, just like an operation, because the pilot has decided to fly for British Midland Airways Ltd. that morning. He probably took the British Airways shuttle with him without telling anyone. That is an absolute parallel—*[Interruption.]* Yes, or teachers. They are the same, but they would take the blackboard with them.

The argument for allowing more private practice was that it would help to reduce waiting lists. It was said that people going into private care would help to reduce waiting lists. There was no evidence whatsoever of that, and there has been no evidence since. Indeed, waiting lists have increased. However, that was the argument. That is similar to the argument that if a large queue is waiting for a bus and a taxi comes along and someone gets in the taxi, the queue becomes smaller. However, they do not realise that there is a large queue for a bus in the first place because the person who is supposed to be driving the bus is moonlighting and driving the taxi. That is the problem that we face with private practice in the National Health Service.

I am glad that the Government see the problems that they generated when they changed the contract in the 1980s. They accept that the contract produces inefficiency and encourages absence from the NHS. I hope that they will accept new clause 2, which deals with merit awards, and new clause 3. The system must be overhauled in the interests of fairness, equity and open government.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have had a riveting exposé of the more arcane features of the merit award system and the functioning of consultants in hospitals from one who knows, in the person of the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith). I only hope, for his sake, that he is not ill in the next week or two.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will keep the matters under review in the regular discussions he has with the presidents of the royal colleges. In those discussions he should continue to consider the equally important question which impinges directly on the efficiency and effectiveness of consultants and their involvement in local management processes: that is, the question of their contracts being held at district level. The excuse that is usually given for this not being considered is that many consultants work for several districts. That is hardly an important reason, since the number of such consultants is not known by the DHSS, as I elicited through a parliamentary question not long ago.

In the regular discussions and consultations that my right hon. Friend has with the royal colleges, he should consider not only the points that were made by the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden, but also a change in where consultants' contracts are held, because it would contribute greatly to the efficiency of the service if their accountability lay where their work is.

Mr. Newton: In responding to the debate, I can most easily indicate my general approach by saying a word first about what my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard) said about the point at which consultants' contracts are held, because it will cover the generality of the thrust of my reply, which is that we are always prepared to keep these matters under review. I noted with great interest the suggestions that were made by the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) and by my hon. Friend.

I shall also take such steps as I can to ensure that the hon. Gentleman's remarks are drawn to the attention of his colleagues in the profession not in the spirit that my hon. Friend implied about what they might do to penalise him, should the occasion arise, but rather that they may reflect on those remarks.

I hope that the House will understand why I will comment on only one or two practical points rather than cover the full sweep of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. His proposed new clause 2 would exclude from the receipt of distinction awards all maximum part-time consultants, including those who carry out their contractual duties entirely properly and efficiently, while it would make no changes to the position of consultants holding other types of contracts. As he said, maximum part-time consultants are expected to devote substantially the whole of their professional time to their duties in the NHS and to have the same commitment to continuing patient care as whole-timers. That may include being available to give emergency cover at night and at weekends. This is more than a technicality, although I understand that it could be said to be a technicality.

If the new clause were adopted in its present form, the most likely outcome would be that most maximum part-timers would not become full-timers, but would change to nine-session part-time contracts to secure their right to be considered for distinction awards and to undertake unlimited private practice. The loser in that would almost certainly be the Health Service.

Mr. Robin Cook: I wish to clarify the terms of the new clause. As the Minister will be aware, its purpose is to bar from awards consultants holding maximum part-time contracts and undertaking private work. It is not our intention to bar from merit awards those consultants, albeit a minority, on maximum part-time, who become maximum part-timers for other reasons than a wish to carry out private work, such as female consultants who work as maximum part-timers because of family commitments. It is important that I put that on the record; otherwise I dare not go home at the weekend.

Mr. Newton: I should not want the hon. Members for Livingston (Mr. Cook) and for Strathkelvin and Bearsden to be persecuted by every doctor in Scotland.

The comments of the hon. Member for Livingston have left me in some slight difficulty, although I do not mind that. The difficulty is that the clauses are meant to be read together for what they are—two separate and distinct propositions. Unquestionably, the interpretation that I have just given is what new clause 2 states. The hon. Gentleman's interpretation relates to what would happen if new clause 2 and new clause 3 were amalgamated. Nevertheless, it does not significantly alter the point that I sought to make. Indeed, if anything, it may strengthen it.

[Mr. Newton]

If the position that would be created jointly by the two new clauses were brought about, and possibly by either of them separately, the most likely outcome would be the loss of several consultants to the Health Service or a diminution of their commitment to the Health Service by moving to part-time contracts of fewer sessions than are implied by a maximum part-time contract. I doubt whether that was intended, but it was reasonable for me to make that point.

9.30 pm

I am glad that the hon. Member for Livingston made his point. The tears that the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden wept over the plight of women in relation to merit awards appeared to be crocodile tears, in the light of the rest of his proposition, which would certainly have made it much more difficult for women to receive merit awards.

In view of the time, the desire to make progress, and the slight confusion that has been created by the way in which the clauses were presented and the way in which they were represented, it is probably not sensible for me to say more except to repeat that I shall reflect on what has been said and ensure that, by various means, it is drawn to the attention of the professions, the advisory bodies and, indeed, the review body.

Question put and negatived.

New clause 5

GENERIC PRODUCTS

'(1) Where drugs, medicines or listed appliances are ordered by their brand name for a person by a medical practitioner in pursuance of his functions in the health service, the Scottish health service, the Northern Ireland health service or the armed forces of the Crown (excluding forces of a Commonwealth country and forces raised in a colony), it shall be the duty of the person supplying such drugs, medicines or appliances to supply a generic product approved by the Secretary of State instead of the product by its brand name.

(2) Subsection (1) above shall not apply where the person for whom the drugs, medicines or appliances are ordered requests the product to be supplied by its brand name, and in that case he shall pay any additional cost of such product in excess of the cost of the generic product.'.—*[Mr. Wareing.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

When the Government talk about savings and value for money in the National Health Service, one aspect is conspicuous by its absence. Some may consider that it may have something to do with the old adage that he who pays the piper calls the tune. As we know, some pharmaceutical companies are adept at providing funds for the Tory party's election expenses. I wonder whether that motivates the Conservative party in relation to generic prescribing and generic substitution.

The essence of generic prescribing is that a doctor uses the approved name of a drug—that is to say, the accepted name of the chemical entity that makes up the drug. The purpose of new clause 5 is to ensure that, even if a general practitioner has prescribed a branded drug, it is possible and nearly always cheaper for a patient to be offered a generic substitute. I should have thought that that would be in accordance with Government policy, as indeed it is in accordance with the Opposition's policy.

The National Health Service drugs bill is about £2 billion a year. That generic prescribing can bring about a reduction in that colossal figure is proven by the fact that, when the limited list that only partially involved generic prescribing was introduced, the Government were able to claim that £75 million was saved in the first year of operation. The Department of Health and Social Security already advises its general practitioners that they should look to generic prescribing, and hospitals generically prescribe for their patients as a matter of course.

We should be looking for real savings in prescribing. Such savings would benefit not only the Government in terms of public expenditure, but those patients who will be even more deprived as a result of many other aspects of the Government's policy, part of which we debated this afternoon. Anything that helps those patients in these days of higher prices in the National Health Service will be warmly received.

I shall not cite journals of the Labour movement, but the "Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin" of 30 November 1987 estimated that there could be an overall saving of £100 million to the National Health Service if generic substitution were introduced. That journal, worthy though it may be, was assuming that it would be non-mandatory generic substitution. Even more substantial benefits to the National Health Service in terms of cost-effectiveness could be achieved if the Government accepted the new clause. Incidentally, I was rather pleased that, although the Government did not accept new clause 2, there were signs that it did not entirely offend them. I hope that we shall fare as well with this new clause.

The savings would be very great. Let us consider the example of the antibiotic sold by Pfizer under the brand name Vibramycin. A bottle of 50 tablets of Vibramycin costs the patient and the National Health Service £23. Roxycycline, a generic substitute sold by Harris Pharmaceuticals, sells at £10 for 50 tablets. That represents a saving of £13 on every 50 tablets prescribed. It is not excessive to estimate that the overall savings to the National Health Service could be about £400 million if mandatory generic substitution was in operation. Let me give another example. A 100-pack of 100 mg Zyloric costs £16·13, but the generic Allopurinol costs £1·49. On that drug alone there is a saving of 90·7 per cent.—more than £10 million.

If the Government are looking for money for the National Health Service, there is no excuse. In the main, the drug companies—many of them foreign multinationals—are waxing very rich in relation to the National Health Service. I am glad to see Conservative Members nodding. I only wish that their nods were nods in the direction of the Aye Lobby. However, Conservative Members are very late learners; some of them had to wait until this afternoon to discover what was happening under other Government legislation.

It is very important that patients should have a clear idea of what is being prescribed for them. Under the present system of branded products, many different names are given to the same medicine. I am sorry that we are not able to debate the new clause about benzodiazepines. The most lethal of these is lorazepam, which comes either as Ativan produced by Wyeth or as Almazine produced by Steinhard. I wonder how many people who have been

prescribed Almazine knew that they were taking this potentially lethal drug which is exactly the same as Ativan, now going under the name of lorazepam.

The benzodiazepine called temazepam, which was prescribed last year over 7 million times at a cost to the National Health Service of more than £11 million, has all sorts of side and withdrawal effects that should be well known to many doctors. According to the British National Formulary, that drug can come in three different forms.

The Government were advised long ago in the Greenfield report of 1982 that generic substitution should be in operation in the National Health Service. Of course we know that the Government are deaf to advice, even from their own advisers. The report said:

"We consider that many doctors would be quite content for their patients to receive an alternative version of the drug prescribed, but that they tend to prescribe the proprietory brand with which they are most familiar. We therefore suggest the introduction of a simple scheme which would require doctors to indicate a positive preference for the proprietory version by initialling a box provided for that purpose".

The report quite clearly approved of the whole idea of generic substitution. The then Minister for Health, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), argued against that when he made a statement in the House in December 1983. His argument was not very convincing. Its crux appeared to be where he said:

"The committee"—

that is, the Greenfield committee—

"acknowledged that it had not taken account of the wider implications, for example on the pharmaceutical industry, of its recommendation."—[*Official Report*, 8 December 1983; Vol. 50, c. 474.]

The pharmaceutical industry does very well out of the National Health Service. I have yet to hear of one of the large pharmaceutical firms complaining that it is on the border of liquidation. As I have said, some of them can find extra funds to help to finance the Conservative party.

Real benefits can flow from generic prescribing, and that is why we should look for a positive means of giving the National Health Service a monetary boost by cutting its costs. Generic names show the chemical class to which drugs belong and that gives information about properties. Names such as Ativan and Valium do not give such information until it is too late and patients suddenly complain about side and withdrawal effects. Generic substitution would mean a single name and that would reduce the present confusion about the naming of drugs. Normal generic names are used in medical teaching and in medical bulletins, and should be well known to the medical profession.

One other economy for the Health Service would result from the economy to pharmacists. Instead of holding the very large stocks that they presently have to hold because of the large number of branded products, they would be able to reduce their stocks and costs. That in itself would be a saving, and costs would be cut all round. There are many arguments about what those costs would be. In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), the Minister for Health said on 11 February that only 28 per cent. of prescriptions dispensed in Britain are generically dispensed. That was according to the figures for 1986. On the same day, the Minister said that the prescribing of all drugs generically would bring about a saving of about £35 million in England. Obviously it would be more if it included the United Kingdom as a whole.

9.45 pm

The Government all too often tell us that they believe in competition. We should ask ourselves what branded goods imply. Branded goods constitute a monopoly practice. They are a way of dividing the market between different consumers of essentially the same product. We have heard of that happening in many other respects. For example, it has happened with detergents. What the great monopolist cannot get with Omo he gets with Tide. The same principles apply to the pharmaceutical companies.

General practitioners in our urban areas are often overburdened and are pressurised by the ad-men into prescribing this or that branded product. All too often they have little time to consider the reality that lies behind brand X, brand Y or brand Z. If the Government's belief in abandoning restrictive practices is wider than their belief in simply abandoning those practices in the labour market, they should be looking to some of their friends in the pharmaceutical industry who could be providing a real service to the country by placing their goods on the market for what they are, by providing the public with real information about the chemical composition of a product and by ensuring that there is a cost advantage to the NHS.

It seems wrong for a Socialist to be telling Tories what to believe in. However, I strongly suspect that one of the factors behind the Government's thinking is that they dare not offend their monopolistic friends. There is no reason why they should be worried about that. We are not afraid to offend some of our friends when the occasion demands it. I see no reason why a Government as arrogant as this and with such a large majority who say that they fear nowt should not be prepared to take action.

I hope that the House will give its blessing to the new clause. I know that there are some Conservative Members who will at least have some sympathy with the notion. I hope that the Government will for once feel it in their bones tonight to say yes to the advice that has been given not only by the official Opposition but by the Government's own advisers.

Mrs. Currie: I listened to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) with interest. It is clear from this and the previous debate that some hon. Members feel that they know much more about medicine than doctors do. That will sound a little odd when one considers what they will be saying on clause 13 tomorrow.

Our objective in much of what we are trying to do is to obtain better health and better value for money. Those are the objectives set out in the White Paper. I am sure that the objectives of the hon. Member for West Derby are the same. Therefore, it is a pity that he felt obliged to have a go at the drug companies in the way that he did.

When we discussed some of these issues in Committee it was clear that some hon. Members—I am not sure about the hon. Member for West Derby—would solve the problems that he described by nationalising the pharmaceutical industry. Indeed, the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) admitted that.

Mr. Wareing: Why not?

Mrs. Currie: No doubt there are Labour Members who believe that they could run the pharmaceutical industry as well as they ran steel and shipbuilding and every other industry that was taken into public ownership but destroyed. The noble Lord Wilson put such rather silly thinking into context during a discussion about

[Mrs. Currie]

nationalising high street shops that sold clothes. He said that he would have difficulty explaining to his constituents how nationalising Marks and Spencer would make it as efficient as the Co-op. Labour Members who think that they could run the pharmaceutical industry more efficiently should give that example some thought.

Mr. Wareing: I know that you, Mr. Speaker, will bring us to order if we stray too far from the new clause, but will the Minister ask her right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) about the nationalisation of Rolls-Royce in 1972? Was that a waste of taxpayers' money?

Mrs. Currie: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman takes such an interest in my constituents. We have handed Rolls-Royce back to the private sector and everybody in Derby is thrilled to bits.

Given the philosophies of Labour Members, it is not surprising that a small number of companies have reacted in political terms in the way that the hon. Gentleman described earlier.

My Department is the sponsoring Department for the pharmaceutical industry. We should be proud of the industry's achievements, which depend on a strong base and on achieving a reasonable rate of return for its investment, particularly in research and development. If we were to force generic drugs on the National Health Service in the way suggested, the effect on the industry would be substantial and adverse. We are talking about 87,000 people directly employed in the United Kingdom in 1988 by Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry companies. They estimate that indirect employment amounts to 250,000 jobs. Their capital investment in the United Kingdom will be about £400 million this year and their exports amount to £1·7 billion. The net positive United Kingdom trade balance in pharmaceuticals is about £850 million per year.

The pharmaceutical sector, which the new clause would so damage if it were passed, is the most significant contributor to the United Kingdom's balance of trade, after oil and transport. Most significant of all is its research and development spending. The industry estimates that this year it will spend £700 million in the United Kingdom on research and development. Indeed, about 10 per cent. of all British and manufacturing industry research and development spending is contributed by the pharmaceutical sector.

The case is always put to us—we take it very seriously—that research and development are strongly linked to our spend with the industry. If the National Health Service had to carry out the necessary research and development, I am sure that the cost would be greater than the amounts that I have just mentioned.

Mr. Wareing: Does the Minister agree that the new clause would not interfere with the patent rights of pharmaceutical firms? Those patent rights, covering a period of 20 years, give full compensation for research and development costs.

Mrs. Currie: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. The new clause does not interefere with existing legislation. He will be aware that there are active and heated discussions going on elsewhere about the length of time for which a patent should apply. The drug companies have strongly expressed the view to us that they would be most concerned if generic prescribing were to be made compulsory. We should be aware of the vast amount of research and development that the industry does, using the money that we pay it—we are the largest purchaser of its drugs—and which we would have to do if we were to match the amount that it is doing at present.

The Guardian of 15 March 1988 reported that Glaxo had increased its research and development costs from £67 million to £101 million, which was reported recently to the company shareholders. It is expecting to spend £220 million in the full year, and that is an enormous amount of money. I understand that Glaxo is to spend £500 million over the next five years building a brand new medical research centre at Stevenage, employing up to 2,000 people. That includes some 600 new jobs. I wish that it were in Derby. It will develop new treatment for infectious diseases, cancer and immunology. It will rank among the most advanced research facilities in the world.

Companies can do that only if they know that their products will be prescribed in the way that they are now. I was interested to hear that the hon. Member for West Derby is in favour of a selected list. I listened to his eulogies with great interest. I was a Back Bencher at that time and I remember that Opposition Members spoke against the limited list. I also remember that Opposition Members predicted all sorts of dire consequences as a result of what my hon. Friends were going to do at the time. I also seem to remember that Opposition Members voted against it. St. Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus offers a reasonable analogy to what the hon. Gentleman has just said. We will bear his views in mind.

The new clause seeks the complete and compulsory use of generic products. We do not agree. The Opposition have argued that it would save money. Once again, I applaud the Opposition's interest in that objective. This evening for the first time, with the possible exception of the merit awards, they are keen that we should get value for money in the Health Service.

We believe that we can save money without compulsion and that a better overall objective would be better prescribing. That goes wider than generic substitution. As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, there have been sharp improvements in generic prescription, without any compulsion. He mentioned that the number of prescriptions being written and dispensed generically in Great Britain had doubled from 14 to 28 per cent. in the 10 years between 1976 and 1986.

Even more interesting is the fact that the number of prescriptions written generically but not necessarily dispensed generically, as there may not be a suitable generic product and the doctor writes the generic name, has gone up from 20 to 38 per cent. That means, broadly speaking, that some 40 per cent. of prescriptions are being written in a way that would meet with the hon. Gentleman's approval. The percentage is much higher in England than in Wales or Scotland, and perhaps hon. Members might take that on board.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I am a friend of many of the drug companies, yet they deplore what they are doing in relation to pure research. The Minister should consider the concern of the drug companies, which is shared by Sir George Porter and others, that the Government do not put nearly enough into fundamental science. The Minister

mentioned Scotland. The understandable and justified squeals from the department of biochemistry—a very distinguished department at Edinburgh—are one example of the shortage of funds for basic sciences. The Minister and her Department should do something to persuade the Government to spend more on pure scientific research at the universities.

Mrs. Currie: The Government will respond in the usual way to the report of the Select Committee in the other place. We will take into account everything that is said.

I recall that one of the criticisms that is often put to British researchers is that we are very good at basic sciences but pretty hopeless at getting those excellent discoveries brought into development and use. That is not an adequate criticism of the pharmaceutical industry. This industry does basic science and funds a lot of research, including that in university departments. It puts a heck of a lot of money into first-class research and development and brings to the market marvellous drugs to which many of us owe our lives and for which many of us are very grateful. I take seriously what the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said; I merely suggest that some aspects of the pharmaceutical industry are a first-class example to other industries for which I do not have direct ministerial responsibility.

I agree with many of the points made by the hon. Member for West Derby about local initiatives to improve prescribing. Voluntary measures to improve prescribing are achieving considerable savings. For example, in a group general practice in Scotland, the introduction of a formulary saved about 10 per cent. in terms of cost per person and per item. In Hampshire, the local medical and pharmaceutical committees have estimated that it might be possible to achieve a potential saving of up to £3·5 million. They propose to achieve that saving in a number of ways, including standardisation to 28 days' supply, a two-week trial for new medicines instead of a month, and the greater use of five-day courses for antibiotics, rather than seven.

On that basis——

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Health and Medicines Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Question again proposed, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mrs. Currie: On that basis, there is considerable scope for other local family practitioner committees and local medical committees to copy. In hospitals, the introduction of a formulary and management system has resulted in substantial savings. Guy's hospital, for example, experienced a decrease in actual spending of 16 per cent. over a four-year period, which is a constant price saving of 29 per cent. From a meeting that I had this morning with the chairmen of a number of family practitioner committees I know that a number of them are interested in using the Guy's hospital formulary.

Wandsworth has had a decrease in actual expenditure of 12 per cent. over four years as against a 20 per cent. increase in activity. Ninewells, which is the teaching hospital in Dundee, effected a 15 per cent. reduction in drug costs on the medical wards in the first year of introducing a formulary. Westminster hospital has demonstrated a sustained reduction over seven years and spent 23 per cent. less, in constant price terms, at the end than it spent at the beginning.

We take on board, therefore, much of what the hon. Gentleman has said. In other parts of the country, similar initiatives are being taken. There is a great deal of local interest in more economic prescribing. That is the basis on which to proceed, rather than by compulsion and limiting ourselves to generic prescribing.

The overall drugs bill for the National Health Service is now over £2 billion, of which £1·6 billion is spent by the family practitioner service. We probably have more influence over the price of the drugs that we buy than many purchasers in other countries. Our negotiations with this important industry are designed to strike a balance between maintaining the strong, vigorous, research-based industry which we have in the United Kingdom and which it is in all our patients' interests to have, and obtaining value for money for patients. Our voluntary system does both. Compulsory generic substitution would probably do neither. Therefore, we reject the new clause.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): It is all very well for the Minister to say that she is proud of the pharmaceutical industry. The pharmaceutical industry has far too many blotches and blemishes for that kind of uncritical and complacent attitude.

I do not propose to go on about Opren. If I did, you, Mr. Speaker, would say that I was out of order, because Opren is not a generic product. The Minister, with her pathetic and inadequate advice on that subject, ought to know that she cannot say that the pharmaceutical industry is something to be proud of. It is not. The pharmaceutical industry has produced some fine products, it has a fine record and it deserves great praise, but the Minister ought to reconsider her views and look far more carefully and seriously at the pharmaceutical industry's shortcomings.

I support new clause 5. When drugs are supplied, they should be generic products. I want to speak about tranquillisers. If generic products are supplied, the effects will be much the same as the effects of those dreadful products that are not generic, such as Opren and, in particular, Ativan which are tranquillisers and have caused such terrible damage to millions of people.

The campaign by *The Observer* in articles by Carmel Fitzsimons has done a great deal to alert the public to the grave and tragic effect of tranquillisers. It is a horrifying story which should disturb the House.

On 25 March, in a fairly remarkable answer to a parliamentary question, the Minister for Health said that half a million people were dependent on benzodiazepines in 1986, compared with 28 in 1977. What is the reason for that astounding increase? It is staggering, and demands immediate investigation.

In June 1984, the Minister said that the Department was fully aware of the public and professional concern that some people might be dependent on prescribed minor tranquillisers. Although the Department was "fully aware", very little has been done by the Government to deal with this grave medical problem. It is appalling that, in the four years since that answer, there are still 25 million prescriptions of tranquillisers every year, and half a million people are affected. Many are generic products. Some are not sold.

I find it shocking that research was not conducted originally into whether those tranquillisers caused

[Mr. Jack Ashley]

dependency, and that general practitioners prescribed them so casually, despite warnings from the Committee on Safety of Medicines. The doctors have nothing to be proud of.

I also find it shocking that the British drug industry is not working actively to help and advise those who are addicted on how to reduce their dependency, and that the drug industry of which the Minister says that she is so proud, ignoring all its shortcomings, is not actively seeking research and treatment for addicts. It is also very serious that the Department is not leading, rather than following, the voluntary organisations in tackling this serious drug menace.

The pharmaceutical industry of which the Minister is so proud has a major responsibility to help. It should embark on a major research project to help to overcome the problems of addiction. The industry of which the Minister is so proud is mainly responsible for the problem of addiction. It caused the problem, and it should do something to solve it instead of sitting back and enjoying the profits. It should work with the Government in a co-operative endeavour to help.

I hope that the Minister will listen to these reasoned, moderate criticisms, and will get together with the pharmaceutical industry and say, "Let us try to do something to help the millions of people who are suffering."

Clear warnings should also be visible on all prescriptions, as is done in the United States. Why cannot these innocent people, who are seeking help because their nerves are bad and the stress is so great, see a warning on the bottle? That would be simple, easy and reasonable, and I think that it should be done. It is wrong that people should have to rely on doctors' advice, because far too often doctors do not bother with advice from the Committee on Safety of Medicines. They are too busy, indolent, or sometimes ignorant. There are some fine doctors, but there are some bad doctors. We cannot rely on the bad doctors. Certain notices should be on the bottle.

The Minister should launch a vigorous campaign to prevent the further spread of addiction to tranquillisers, in particular benzodiazepines, and ensure that back-up support is available.

I know that the Minister's Department is short of cash, but I hope that she will do what she can to finance the marvellous work of voluntary organisations such as Tranx-line, and the one in London whose name I have forgotten.

Mrs. Currie: We already do.

Mr. Ashley: Perhaps the Minister will help them a little more because they are short of money.

If the Minister takes my proposals on board, she will help millions of people. I spoke last week to a man who talked of committing suicide because of his addiction to tranquillisers. He has tried to end his addiction, but he has hallucinations and he is driven round the bend. He needs help, support, advice and comfort.

Mr. Wareing: I am obliged to my right hon. Friend for raising that issue. In many respects, he contradicts what the Minister said. I noticed that the Minister was nodding her head vigorously and saying that the Government are funding those voluntary organisations. However, the Government have only pump-primed them, with no more than £333,000. For example, the Council for Involuntary Tranquilliser Addiction in Merseyside has received no money at all. Much more is being spent on combating the abuse of hard drugs. Very little is going to the voluntary organisations which are so useful to the NHS.

Mr. Ashley: I appreciate that point. The Minister has written me a letter explaining what she does for the voluntary organisations. However, the voluntary organisations in Liverpool have said that they receive very little indeed. In fact, they have said that they receive nothing. Therefore, the Minister must face the challenge of whether to help such organisations. The organisations are complaining of poverty and a lack of Government help in their work in assisting addicts.

I do not want merely to score points; I want the Minister's help and co-operation. If we all work together we can reduce the suffering of the millions of addicts. Let us help them to beat their addiction. Let us help to prevent addiction. That can be done only if the Minister stops saying that she is proud of the pharmaceutical industry, looks at the blemishes and takes on board the criticisms. The pharmaceutical industry has a fine record, but it also has many blemishes and it is the blemishes that should be examined. The Minister should do something to help those addicts.

10.15 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): My hon. Friend the Minister is right to praise the pharmaceutical industry. I shall explain why. In 1840, or thereabouts, the average life expectancy was 27 years. Now people can expect to live deep into their 70s and beyond. In fact, Her Majesty the Queen sends out more telegrams of congratulation to people who have reached 100 years of age than ever before.

That is a great tribute to the medics of this country and to the pharmaceutical industry. It is a great credit to all of them, but people must remember that, when pharmaceutical companies put money into research and development for new drugs to sustain life and make people more comfortable, they also put thousands of pounds into unsuccessful research. When they develop a drug that is useful to mankind, they do a tremendous service. They then have to develop a plant, so they have to make capital expenditure on a processing plant to produce and market that research product.

The companies also have to think in terms of recovery in two or three years' time to recover that money. It is right, therefore, that they should have the right sort of profit margin for research and development and to recover the capital costs of their plant. They talk in terms of two or three years because, by that time, someone often develops a new drug and puts it on the market. Therefore, the great profit that people say pharmaceutical companies enjoy goes to another company. However, at the same time, it is healthy competition. It is developing drugs for the good of mankind. It is totally unfair to criticise the Minister for saying that we owe——

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dickens: No, I shall not.

It is unfair to criticise the Minister for saying that we owe a great debt to the pharmaceutical industry. I venture to suggest that there is scarcely an hon. Member in the Chamber this evening who has not been thankful to the pharmaceutical industry. We have wonderful medics in this country, some of the best in the world. We have wonderful pharmaceutical industries, some of the best in the world. It is right that they should be developing and researching new drugs to sustain mankind up to and beyond the age of 70, instead of the age of 27, as it was in 1840. That speaks for itself.

Dr. Moonie: I had not intended to intervene so quickly in the debate, but I could not resist the temptation, having listened to the absolute drivel that has been promulgated for the last five minutes.

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): The hon. Gentleman is the expert on drivel.

Dr. Moonie: Yes, I am, particularly when it comes from the Conservative Benches on my own subject, which is the role of medicine in the health of the community and particularly the role of the medical profession. I cannot understand how anyone with a basic education could imagine that a major percentage of the increase in life expectancy of the human race is due to the medical profession. Even the medical profession would not have claimed that. I have never heard such rubbish in all my life.

The hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) disgressed a little from the subject. The increase in life expectancy is due not to the benefits of drugs, but to the way in which life expectancy from birth is calculated. Almost 90 per cent. of the improvement is due to the change in infant and perinatal mortality, which means that the nine out of 10 babies that used to die early in life no longer do so. That is why life expectancy has increased. In the 1840s, if one was fortunate enough to survive beyond the first or second year, one's life expectancy was little shorter than it is now.

The other factors that have played a part are the development of decent wages and conditions, good housing and an adequate diet. Those factors, not the medical profession, have led to an increase in life expectancy.

Let us consider the wonderful pharmaceutical industry. Unlike most hon. Members present tonight, I have worked in the industry and in the development of new drugs—the wonderful new products about which everyone talks. I can think of possibly three over the past 10 years that could be dignified with the description of a major advance in treatment.

Some 95 per cent. of those drugs are what we call "Me, too." someone develops a new product and someone else comes along, takes the formula, makes minor changes, gets a patent and puts it into animals and man. Lo and behold, the new drug has the same effect as the drug that came before it. Small wonder, because it is effectively the same drug. It is not claimed that the new drug is better. However, largely spurious statistical studies are carried out which conclude that the drugs are equally effective. In fact, the conclusion shows that both drugs have the same effects and the effects are indistinguishable. That means that both drugs might be ineffective, and frequently they are.

The drugs used in the vast majority of cases are not terribly effective. They may help us to bear some of the chronic conditions that we suffer nowadays, but they do not cure them. They do not cure any of the modern illnesses like diabetes or arthritis, from which so many people suffer. They cannot cure heart disease, hypertension, arteriosclerosis, or senile dementia.

Mr. Dickens: I realise that the hon. Gentleman is a self-confessed doctor, and I am surprised at his comments. With regard to diabetes, why is the doctor saying that drugs just make people comfortable when he knows jolly well as a medical man that, unless a patient's blood count is right, with the right dose of insulin or sugar, that patient can go into coma and possibly die? How can the hon. Gentleman stand up and give false information when he knows differently from his training?

Dr. Moonie: The trouble is that once one has experience of the subject, one learns that things are not always as they seem. Diabetics certainly do not die as young as they used to, but they are not cured. They receive help to manage their affliction. However, although advances are being made which may change this, at the moment they die in later life from different but related conditions and suffer a great deal in the process. This is a serious matter and we should be careful before we give unrestricted praise to the medical profession or the pharmaceutical industry.

Mr. Corbyn: My hon. Friend is making a valuable contribution, which is more than can be said for some of the other contributions this evening. My hon. Friend obviously has experience of the drugs industry from his work as a doctor. Does he have any comment to make on the wastefulness of competition and the wastefulness of very high profit margins enjoyed by the privately owned drug companies at the moment?

Dr. Moonie: The profit margins on successful drugs are extremely high, as I am sure this Government and their predecessors are only too well aware. Hence the restricted list, which was rightly brought in several years ago to restrict prescribing costs. It is legitimate in a society in which drugs are manufactured by private companies to ensure that those companies receive a return on their investment; otherwise we would not have their investment and we might have to look elsewhere for it.

We are perhaps over-generous in the amount of compensation that we give private companies. For example, over the past 20 years Hoffman La Roche has produced drugs that are of virtually no benefit to mankind. For many years it has charged the Health Service inordinate prices for those drugs, and it now leads the struggle against the provision of generic substitutes for those very products. It knows full well that the drugs can be made for pence, yet they can be sold by the company under brand name protection for pounds.

Generic drugs are sound, safe and subjected to the same, if not more, stringent testing for solubility and type of action—I will not go into that, as it is a highly technical point—and they are as effective, or ineffective, as the products with which they are competing. However, generic drugs have the singular advantage that they are much cheaper. Therefore, they can help our over-burdened Health Service to meet a greater proportion of its increased costs through saving money on its drug bills. For that reason alone, the new clause is worthy of support.

Mr. Wareing: I have listened intently to what the Minister has had to say. While I do not accept many of her

[Mr. Wareing]

arguments, particularly about the worth of the pharmaceutical industry, I would not want to detract from the useful research done by the industry. My hon. Friends have pointed out that more quality control may be desirable, particularly with regard to benzodiazepines. I am not won over by the argument about trade, because we have had the experience of transfer pricing by Hoffman La Roche and other monopoly practices by pharmaceutical companies. I am not at all happy that retail price maintenance, which was abolished over 20 years ago for most commodities, still applies to pharmaceutical products.

Having said that, however, I note that the hon. Lady has agreed to some extent with what Opposition Members have said. I am sure that we will return to this matter again and again, until generic substitution becomes the vogue in the National Health Service. Therefore, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 7

HOSPITAL DOMESTIC SERVICES

'(1) Each district health authority and health board shall make such arrangements as seem to them reasonable for the provision of hospital domestic services.

(2) The Secretary of State shall have no power to direct district health authorities or health boards on whether they employ outside contractors in making arrangements under subsection (1).

(3) Notwithstanding subsection (2) the Secretary of State may specify minimum standards of hygiene to be required of arrangements under subsection (1).'.—*[Mr. Norman Hogg.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

It is right that responsibility for domestic services in the National Health Service should lie with the district health authorities, or, in the case of Scotland, with the health boards. That may seem obvious, but there has been some activity on the part of the Government of late that leads us to believe that they take a different view. The DHAs and the health boards have responsibility for catering and cleaning. My colleagues and I believe it to be right that management should be as close as possible to the delivery of services.

The problems associated with domestic services have a great deal to do with poor pay and conditions, and little to do with poor management or lack of motivation. Recently the Government have sought means of privatising services through competitive tendering, and we have seen Whitehall telling the DHAs and health boards how it is to be tackled. There are more problems arising from under-investment in hospitals, low pay and buildings which are not conducive to efficient working than from the fact that the services are run by internal staff.

Circular letters have been sent by the Minister responsible for the Health Service in Scotland, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), and I am sorry that he is not here. Ah, he has just arrived. This is really something of an occasion, because we had hoped to have the services of the Scottish Health Minister in considering the Bill in Committee, but I can promise him that when we go into Committee next week on the School Boards (Scotland) Bill I will repeat all my speeches on the Health and Medicines Bill so that he will not have missed anything.

The Minister sent a letter to the health boards in Scotland telling them how they might proceed to privatise services, or, as he might prefer to say, to introduce competitive tendering. The result has been a fall in the morale of the staff of Scottish hospitals, culminating in days of action, and he must accept some responsibility for the present situation. One needs only to look at the experience of district health authorities in the privatisation of catering and cleaning to see that such a course is not in the best interests of patient care, which is the primary function of the Health Service.

The National Health Service provides a high standard of catering at extremely reasonable prices. I checked on that this afternoon and found that University College hospital, London, which has a staff of 72 in its catering service, provides 1,600 meals per day on a budget of just £1·28 per head per day. That shows how efficient the staff can be.

10.30 pm

I am sure that the Egon Ronay guide is widely read on the Government Benches, for reasons other than catering in the Health Service. It is certainly not widely read by the Refreshment Department of the House of Commons. The Egon Ronay guide commented favourably on National Health Service meals and concluded that the food at some of the private hospitals that were visited was little better than, and in one case was below, the average standard served by National Health Service hospitals in the same cities, despite the fact the private sector spends on average four times more per patient on food than does the state. The Egon Ronay guide was complimentary about the quality of the food and its presentation in the National Health Service. The same guide criticised private hospitals, describing their meals as "grossly over-priced". Therefore, when it comes to value for money, that is delivered by the staff in the National Health Service.

These days we hear a lot about cook-chill. I can remember the Minister telling us a lot about cook-chill in Committee. I believe that this system of providing food could prove misguided in terms of the needs in the National Health Service. Indeed, it could well prove disastrous. It can destroy up to 90 per cent. of the vitamins in the food, as well as reduce its palatability——

Mr. Newton: Rubbish.

Mr. Hogg: The Minister for Health says "Rubbish", but I am sure that if he has been asked to reply to the debate he will explain why. All the evidence that I have been able to gather on this subject suggests that that is not a good way for us to proceed in the National Health Service and that there are considerable dangers from wrongly treated food.

There is some evidence that many of the catering staff in the service give up because they find that they are no longer able to earn overtime because of the introduction of that system, which means that they are not able to sustain their standard of living. Indeed, the poverty level wages paid in the National Health Service are not adequate in the first place——

Mr. Newton: I am not sure whether I should intervene but I addressed a seminar of cook-chill on Sunday evening which was no doubt very good for my soul. The hon. Gentleman will doubtless further explain his concerns for the staff, but I advise him that the purpose of a hospital food system is to provide good quality palatable food for the patient, hot and at the right time. There is little doubt that cook-chill is capable of doing that better than most conventional systems.

Mr. Hogg: I do not know where the Minister delivered his lecture on cook-chill last Sunday evening. I did not realise that he was the Government's answer to the "Galloping Gourmet".

My point about the staff is that where they are employed for the job for which they are trained—that is the preparation, cooking, and serving of the food—they have to work overtime to sustain the service and their standard of living. The Government are using the process of cook-chill to achieve savings in the National Health Service, which results in those staff not being able to sustain their earnings and, therefore, leaving the service. There is some evidence that, to fill the gap, cleaning and domestic staff are being brought in by contractors to

[Mr. Hogg]

prepare the food, and there are dangers in that. I make that point to the Minister, and I hope that he will consider it again.

Poor pay is a major contributory factor to the problems in the National Health Service and it will not be resolved by privatisation. Low wages lead to low morale which leads to low motivation and low standards. If that was better understood by the Government, perhaps we would begin to get somewhere.

Notwithstanding the pay award which is pending, and which I hope the Government will fund fully, auxiliaries in the NHS start at £4,565 a year. A fully trained staff nurse gets £65 a week less than a fireman, and £109 a week less than a policeman. *[Interruption.]* It has a great deal to do with the problem. About 70 per cent. of nurses are forced to moonlight. The purpose of the new clause is to protect the service from privatisation, but if privatisation is introduced the problems will be aggravated. I do not know why the Government cannot understand that.

The underpaid jobs have one redeeming feature. We raised this in Committee, but the point has still not been adequately answered. In the radio programme in which I took part with the hon. Member for Stirling he did not answer the point. If staff have to engage in competitive tendering for their own jobs, and if the tender is successful and they become private employees in the NHS instead of being NHS employees, is it not the case that they lose their superannuation rights? That point should be clarified, because the superannuation right is the only redeeming feature of the underpaid jobs. What happens to the superannuation rights of someone working for a private company who was previously a public service employee? This must be clarified, because superannuation is an important consideration for people with such poor employment conditions.

Privatisation threatens the whole of patient care, which is the primary function of the National Health Service. Privatisation moves out of the hospital responsibility for important functions, most notably hygiene. Conservative Members are enthusiastic about the introduction of private services, but they do not realise that work in a hospital is a team job and that everyone has a commitment to achieve the highest standards of hygiene as an aid to patient care.

We are discovering a catalogue of horror stories which must be attributed to the fact that privatisation has become such a factor in some places. In Bromley, 351 jobs are documented as having been lost through privatisation. In Greenwich, 150 jobs have been lost, the prices of meals for staff have increased, some kitchens have been closed and more housekeeping duties are being carried out by nursing staff.

In Wandsworth, which is famous—or infamous—for privatisation, there were 739 job losses, the majority of which were 402 domestics at St. George's hospital in Tooting. In Ealing 100 jobs were lost as a result of a catering contract being won by a private contractor. In south London 125 jobs were lost in one case alone, in which a private hospital contractor won a domestic contract for Westminster hospital. The Association of London Authorities advises—*[Interruption.]* The Minister does not care for elected authorities. She much prefers to tell them from Whitehall how to run their affairs. We know that she subscribes to the view that Whitehall knows best. However, in the hospitals in which the Association of London Authorities made inquiries, there were dirty baths and showers, filthy sinks and draining boards, unclean sterile treatment rooms, patient day rooms left unclean, and low staff morale.

On top of that, private contractors have not known what is involved in the cleaning of hospitals. They have not been able to find equipment. They have carried out cleaning procedures when it was not suitable to the immediately important task of hospital patient care. Their untrained staff have cleaned wards and clinics while nurses and doctors have been changing wound dressings and treating patients. There was an example of that at Queen Mary's hospital in Roehampton.

That stems from the fact that the Government do not recognise that hospital staff work as a team for the promotion of patient care and that they must understand what is required of them in the promotion of patient care. That is simply not possible by having private companies do the job in such a temporary way and with such a turnover of staff. Privatisation has been to the detriment of patient care.

One aspect that worries me is the coercion of health boards by the Government. The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland will know what I am about to say. It was deplorable that the chairman of Grampian health board was sent for when he and his board hesitated to act on the Under-Secretary's edict that they were to introduce what he calls competitive tendering in hospitals. The chairman was sent for and given the Star Chamber treatment. On top of that, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Scotland are recorded as saying that the role of health boards in Scotland is to be the Government's agent.

The onward roll of centralism and central Government is the hallmark of contemporary Conservatism. I do not know where it will end, but we in Scotland maintain that the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland has little authority for insisting on a devolved Government role in Scotland and that it is unacceptable that members of health boards should be addressed in such a way. We are weary of the fundamentalists of market forces, who seem to be determined to shove their doctrines down the throat of an unwilling people, as is the case in Scotland.

The Government have no place for patient care in their policies. The House should recognise that by supporting the new clause.

10.45 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I oppose the new clause. It is always disappointing when the Opposition come forward with ideas which are backward-looking and which in many ways conflict with the principles for which the National Health Service should stand. The NHS should be a national service, and to be a national service it needs common standards, some central direction and mission and some common administration and management purpose. The Opposition propose the opposite and seem to wish for a degeneration into local anarchy with no sense of central direction or management control.

Ms. Harman: The hon. Gentleman talks about common standards. Does he not recognise that of something like 400 performance indicators—statistics that the Government are now collecting—only about four

relate to the quality of service and all the rest relate to throughput and cost-cutting? Are those the common standards to which the hon. Gentleman refers?

Mr. Redwood: I do not entirely agree with the hon. Lady's analysis that only four of the performance indicators relate to the quality of care. Many of them relate to staff usage in relation to patient numbers and many people would suggest that that is a proxy for some elements of the quality of care. The majority of indicators are based on such ratios and calculations.

I hope that the House will agree that one should seek value for money in any health system. The Government have introduced proposals that attempt to provide better value for money. The new clause would reverse that process by resisting moves to provide better value for money in hospital domestic services.

I hope that most hon. Members will agree, too, that money should be concentrated where it is most needed —on patient care and on the services that go most directly to the patient. The fears that the Opposition express are strange. If it is true that the hospitals themselves can do the job best, they are free to bid for the business and to carry on as before, demonstrating that they are the cheapest and best and having pride in a job well done. It is curious that when competitions have been organised, the in-house services have often had to change their pricing, management style and many of their practices to win the bids. It is also curious that where the services have been put out to tender there have been substantial savings in most cases. That seems to give the lie to the idea that all the in-house services are absolutely perfect.

We have then to consider the question of quality. It is argued that quality falls down if services are provided by a private contractor. One of the advantages of a private contract, however, is that one can enforce the contract or sack the contractor. There is no advantage in the in-house system. It is a matter of regret that salmonella outbreaks occurring as a result of conditions in hospitals have often started in kitchens where no private caterers are involved. Such outbreaks would be possible under either system, but it is nonsense to let people believe that they happen only where services have been privatised given that the evidence points in the other direction.

If the NHS had a powerful chief executive with the necessary powers to put into place an efficiency drive across a range of activities, it would be quite easy for him, in a relatively short time to deliver £1,000 million of savings which could go straight into patient care. We should all be striving to achieve that. The National Audit Office has identified £300 million to £500 million of savings that could come simply from better use of properties. Several hundred million pounds more could come from the contracting-out of hotel-type services, and that is before considering the broad use of staff, which would be likely to produce savings if a sensible chief executive had the necessary powers.

The new clause would be a retrograde step which would stand in the way of better value for money, better patient care and better national management of the service.

Mr. Galbraith: I should like to make two specific points to the hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). The first is on efficiency. When Conservative Members speak about efficiency, they use the word as a euphemism for cheapness. When they talk about services being better, they mean services being cheaper. The hon. Gentleman had to add as an afterthought the question whether the service might be better. When we talk about efficiency we mean efficiency in the provision of care, getting patients operations when and where they want them and by whom in the surroundings that they want. We do not mean the sort of efficiency that the hon. Gentleman talks about— cheapness at the expense of already low-paid workers in order to fill the pockets of Members who have interests outside the House.

Mr. Dickens: The hon. Gentleman is lecturing us on efficiency. Does he recall that when the Conservatives came back to power in 1979, the Government asked the regional health authorities for their manning levels and that hardly any of them could give us the up-to-date levels or, indeed, any levels? The ones that did give figures were 18 months out of date. That was the efficiency that was achieved under the Labour Government. How can the Opposition lecture us on efficiency in the Health Service?

Mr. Galbraith: I shall resist the temptation to lecture the hon. Gentleman because, even if I spoke to him quietly, he would not understand what I was talking about.

When the hon. Member for Wokingham talked about efficiency, he said that we needed to know more about the Health Service and the various factors that operate in it. Nobody disagrees with that, but there is more to efficiency than Conservative Members seem to think. There is more to it than cutting costs and looking at the financial aspect. As Ministers are always telling us, the purpose of the National Health Service is to provide care for patients. That must be the motivating factor, and it is done by increasing efficiency in the provision of care. Financial efficiency is cheapness, but it comes second to efficiency in the provision of care, in patients being seen when they want, by whom they want and in the surroundings that they want.

The hon. Member for Wokingham spoke about releasing money for patient care. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman appreciates the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg), that everyone in the Health Service is involved in patient care. If we move anyone, care is affected. Conservative Members must agree, because when porters withdraw their labour they are told that it affects patient care. There is a contradiction in the points made by the hon. Gentleman. We have had enough hypocrisy from Conservative Members. Let us concentrate on efficiency in the delivery of patient care and stop using euphemisms about efficiency when what is meant is simply cheapness.

I should like to speak to the new clause, which is more than the hon. Member for Wokingham did. It should commend itself to Ministers because it is all about democracy, devolving power and giving it back to the people. It is about devolution and letting decisions be taken where it matters. The hon. Gentleman talked about central control. How can things be controlled centrally if they are privatised to umpteen companies over which we have absolutely no control? That is the problem. Health boards wish to retain central control and Ministers ought to be keen to accept that, especially in view of the reassurances that they gave us about clause 4. The

[Mr. Galbraith]

Minister will remember that in Committee we discussed that clause. Clause 4(1)(g) provides that the Secretary of State

"may give directions—

(i) for the exercise of any of those powers by any body constituted under the National Health Service Act 1977 or the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978; and

(ii) with respect to the manner in which any such body is to exercise any such power".

We wish to remove that power from the Minister, but he says that there is no problem about the matter, because it is power not to direct health authorities to do anything but to prevent them from doing silly things. The Minister said that it was to prevent them from putting up adverts for undertakers and charging money for them. For that reason, I am sure that the Minister will accept the new clause because it goes along with the philosophy that he put forward in Committee.

The other reason for the new clause is to prevent what recently happened in Scotland with health boards. Here I come to the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth). Michael Forsyth Ltd.—*[Interruption.]* Michael Forsyth Ltd. has nothing whatever to do with the hon. Member for Stirling. I want to make it clear that, when I mention Michael Forsyth Ltd., it has nothing to do with the hon. Member for Stirling.

Here we have the great proponent of democracy who said that he wants parents to have power in education and wants to set up school boards but who will not allow local health boards to do anything. He directs them in a jackboot fashion against their wishes. He calls up the chairmen of the health boards and instructs them to tear up agreements. The health boards had agreements with the trade unions which brought about significant savings for the NHS and the hon. Member for Stirling—not related to Michael Forsyth Ltd.—told them to tear up the agreements. Can you imagine, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what Conservative Members would say if the trade unions were to tear up agreements? I remember Conservative Members saying that it is about time that trade unions stuck to agreements. Well, there were agreements and the hon. Member for Stirling—not related to Michael Forsyth Ltd.—told them to tear them up.

Mr. Dickens: Boring.

Mr. Galbraith: Well, I am going to bore hon. Members a little longer. As I have said, Michael Forsyth Ltd. is not related to the hon. Member for Stirling.

As a result of those agreements—I shall quote the figures of the hon. Member for Stirling—Scotland saved £20 million. The savings from privatisation in England and Wales are £100 million. The equivalent savings in Scotland from agreements with the trade unions are double those from privatisation in England and Wales. Therefore, that is an argument in favour of retaining the arrangements between the health boards and the unions and against privatisation.

We want to give the power back to the health boards to ensure that decisions are taken locally, that all people benefit and that decisions are not made by Michael Forsyth Ltd., which is not related to the hon. Member for Stirling.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): My hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) set out coherently the arguments in favour of this clause. I was particularly interested in the fact that he referred to the cook-chill system. I was gratified to hear that the Minister has become an expert on cook-chill. I invite him to stick around until we reach clause 4 because I intend to refer in some detail to the cook-chill system in Wakefield and I would very much welcome his comments on that. I have tried endlessly to get some response from the Government on it. I hope that he will stay around until 3 or 4 o'clock tomorrow morning, or whenever we reach clause 4.

My hon. Friends have set out the reasoning behind new clause 7. It is about the need to ensure proper standards of hygiene within the NHS and about the rights of working people to fair wages and decent working conditions. Competitive tendering, as the hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) has said, is advanced by the Government for two main reasons. First, on ideological grounds, bringing private companies into the NHS is a move towards breaking up the state, with which the Government are obsessed. Secondly, there is the issue of financial savings, which the hon. Member for Wokingham referred to as value for money. Those savings are supposedly made by privatising various services.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have heard on many occasions, as I have, the figure of £105 million quoted by Government supporters, as being the cumulative saving that has accrued as a direct result of the competitive tendering process. The figures have been used endlessly by Ministers and Government Back Benchers as a justification for turning the screw even further on more and more public services, particularly within the NHS. One can drive a coach and horses through the figure of £105 million; it simply is not accurate. I shall give a few pointers to why it is open to the gravest doubt.

First, the supposed savings do not take account of the time spent by district and regional health authorities on preparing and monitoring tenders. I understand that more than a year ago the National Audit Office estimated that that cost was at least £15 million per annum. Secondly, different accounting methods have been used by district health authorities to assess the base-line cost and to measure the so-called savings of competitive tendering. Consequently, the figures are highly unreliable. Thirdly, redundancy costs have not been accounted for in the savings advanced by Conservative Members, which have supposedly been achieved through competitive tendering. In many areas where people have been made redundant because of competitive tendering those costs are high. Fourthly—this is crucial if one is to assess the real figure involved in this issue—there is the financial cost of forcing hospital workers to be dependent on unemployment and social benefit.

11 pm

The Prime Minister constantly says that no Government have spent more than the present one on social security benefit. Of course that is true, but it is because they have made so many people redundant. They have put hospital workers on the dole and shoved their jobs out to private contractors. Those people are now claiming state benefit. That should be taken into account when considering the savings made by competitive tendering. About 2,000 jobs have been lost in the Yorkshire health authority since 1985, primarily because

of the competitive tendering process. Many of those people are now in receipt of state benefit. That fact should be taken into account when talking about the tremendous savings made through competitive tendering.

The savings made through competitive tendering are a fraud; they are a complete con trick. I would argue that it has cost public money to introduce competitive tendering, regardless of the problems of filth, catering difficulties and the major failures of numerous contracts that my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) mentioned.

I know that on any issue the Government think only in terms of cash, but recently the Prime Minister started lecturing the Church of England and the bishops about morality. Is it morally right that the Budget gave more money per week to some people by way of tax concessions than many National Health Service workers in a year? Is it morally right that people earning less than £70 per week should have their wages driven down? In Committee I gave the example of a taxi driver in Wakefield who collects me who has to moonlight. He showed me his pay slip. He receives £81 per week working as a porter, and that includes a 25 per cent. bonus. He has to keep a family on that sum of money, and when his job is put out to competitive tender shortly, even if the in-house tender is successful, his wages will be driven down further.

Is it morally right that people working in the most basic conditions should have them made even worse? Is it morally right that Tory Members, who have interests in private contracts, should speak in debates on the Health Service and vote on issues when they stand to gain financially? That happens time and again because the Government Benches are riddled by people who stand to gain from this issue. [HON. MEMBERS: "Name them."] It would take me all night to name them.

As a policy, competitive tendering has been a complete and dismal failure. It has been a failure for the district health authorities and health boards that have had to bring it in. It has been a failure for the patients, and, most of all, it has been a failure for the loyal and hard-working employees of the National Health Service. I urge all hon. Members with a conscience to give their full support to new clause 7.

Mr. Corbyn: At last we have an opportunity to debate the hypocrisy that we have heard so often from Ministers and from the Government about privatisation and the alleged efficiencies that emanate from it. They know that it is complete nonsense. In promoting privatisation they are really after a featherbedded system to produce enormous profits for private contractors for cleaning or catering in hospitals. They know perfectly well that the end result of privatisation is a starvation wage for those who work for those private cleaning companies, and enormous profits for the companies, and filthy hospitals.

If the Government bothered to examine the results of the privatisation of cleaning in hospitals, they would find that there are quite appalling and astounding statistics about the number of contract failures. They would discover the number of times that doctors have refused to work in hospitals that are not clean enough, and the number of times that nurses have stopped doing nursing work because the wards are so filthy that the first priority is to clean the wards, not to carry out the necessary treatment of the patients.

The new clause, in a very modest way, is trying to improve the situation. Subsection (1) states:

"Each district health authority and health board shall make such arrangements"

as it wishes for catering services, cleaning services or any other services within a hospital.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Corbyn: I shall complete my point and then give way. The hon. Gentleman may have something useful to say, although I have my doubts.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He said that the new clause states that health authorities shall make such arrangements as they wish. That is not what the new clause says. It says:

"as seem to them reasonable".

Will the hon. Gentleman give the House his definition of reasonable?

Mr. Corbyn: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point, as there is a great deal behind it. My idea of reasonable is reasonable wages for the staff, a high standard of cleanliness and a high standard of service. Above all, the motives behind the provision of that service should be a clean hospital and good quality food for the patients, not the motive of rip-off profits for the fly-by-night companies that seek to run away from the Health Service at the first opportunity.

The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that it is wrong to have a Health Service dominated by private enterprise values that are interested only in making money out of the Health Service. Rather, it should consist of people who are determined to ensure the best possible standards for those who use the Health Service, namely, the patients.

The House should be aware of some of the issues referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). A large number of Conservative hon. Members who have substantial shareholdings in contract cleaning companies regularly put pressure on the Government with regard to the Health Service—as they did at the Carlton Club private lunch, and as they do in boardrooms throughout the country and at dinner tables in this building. They try to convince the Government—who are readily convinced about such matters—that the one thing we need is central direction of health authorities by the Government—who are supposed to be against centralisation—to force them to hand contracts to private cleaning and catering companies. It is a corruption of our political system that that is allowed to happen in this building.

The lid should be taken off the hypocrisy that accompanies this issue and the claims by Conservative Members that there are great savings to be made in the Health Service if we privatise everything. The savings are to be made in the form of profits for companies at the expense of the standards of treatment for patients, of clean hospitals and of good quality food. The profits are made because of dirty hospitals, poor quality food and a high level of unemployment among people who formerly cleaned hospitals and cooked food there. If the Government doubt my word, they should go to hospitals where private companies now do the cleaning, examine standards and talk to people who previously were able to take pride in their work but who are now doing the jobs of

[Mr. Corbyn]

three of four people for a pittance. It is a disgraceful way to treat people who have given long service to the NHS and who are dedicated to it.

In reality, Conservative Members have nothing but contempt for manual workers in the NHS, who have kept the hospitals clean for so long. My hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) said that hospitals cannot be run without catering and cleaning staff. It is about time that hon. Members understood the community of interest in hospitals. Those who clean hospital floors, empty bed pans, wash soiled sheets and do all the unspeakable jobs that Conservative Members would not do in a thousand years, never mind for the wages that manual workers are paid, are every bit as dedicated to the NHS as are doctors, nurses and research chemists. I make no apology for saying that or for reminding the House that I am sponsored by the National Union of Public Employees, which does not pay me one penny piece for making this speech. It exists to represent the interests of low-paid manual workers. It recognises that privatisation is the enemy of decent working conditions, decent staff morale and a good Health Service.

I want the Health Service to be free at the point of use and available to all. I also want it to operate on the basis of not causing fear among its staff, not putting low-paid workers' jobs on sale once a year to the lowest bidder and not forcing low-paid health workers to offer their services for even lower wages to some fly-by-night company that will exploit them for a year, after which somebody else will exploit them.

Ministers should revert to the direct employment system and end fear of low-paid workers in the National Health Service. I hope that the House will return to this issue again and again, so that the scandal of the appalling standards and working conditions that private cleaning and catering companies provide, their attitude towards their staff and their contempt for the Health Service can be further exposed. Then we shall return to a decent system of centralised employment that guarantees proper working conditions and jobs.

Mrs. Currie: As the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) has just reminded us, this is the trade union clause—the NUPE and COHSE clause. It was supported eloquently by the hon. Members for Islington, North and for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), who is also sponsored by NUPE. They are proud of that, and quite rightly, too. The hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg), who moved the new clause, is sponsored by NALGO. It includes among its members many senior managers in the National Health Service and in local government who know that much of what he said is wrong. They are running the system, and they are right to be proud of their achievements.

As for the comments of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) on the performance indicators, I cannot resist the comment that what she said suggests that she has not looked at them, any more than she looked at the General Practice Finance Corporation's annual report. I suggest that she takes another look at them. They are all about getting cost-effective patient care.

New clause 7 deals with hospital domestic services, which I understand mean services that vary widely throughout the Health Service from basic cleaning to a fully developed hotel service, from internal linen distribution to pest control. Rather than improving the present service, the new clause would stifle the competitive tendering initiative that is being shown by managers, many of them members of NALGO, over domestic support services.

I was a little surprised, therefore, to hear all that was said about cook-chill. That is not a domestic service and it has nothing to do with the new clause. It is catering. But perhaps the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth normally eats his dinner off the floor.

Mr. Norman Hogg *rose*——

Mrs. Currie: I am delighted to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

11.15 pm

Mr. Hogg: The Minister is drawing a very narrow definition of "domestic". Perhaps that is because she does not really know much about domestic services. She probably has people to do them for her.

Mrs. Currie: You bet. The hon. Gentleman put down the new clause, and, judging by his opening speech, he clearly did not read it.

However, if we are to talk briefly about cook-chill, let me say that, as 387 catering contracts in England were won in-house and only 11 were won by outside contractors, the odds are that all the cooking that the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends have described—both good and bad—has been done by NHS staff who won their contracts through open competition.

Incidentally, the hon. Gentleman asked what would happen to superannuation. Let me remind him that when NHS staff win a contract they stay as NHS employees, just as local government employees who do the same stay as local government employees. Nothing happens to the superannuation of those employees. They retain all their superannuation rights, and all their other rights as well. If the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends are really putting about that kind of rubbish in Scotland, it is no wonder that his constituents——

Mr. Hogg *rose*——

Mrs. Currie: I shall give way in a moment. I listened to the hon. Gentleman with all the dignity and courtesy that I could muster, and I have not finished my sentence yet.

If the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends have really been putting about that kind of rubbish in Scotland, it is no wonder that his constituents are upset, but it is not true. Nothing will happen to that superannuation, and if he even hints at it he is going much too far.

Mr. Hogg: One of the Minister's roles in the House is to answer reasonably questions that are put reasonably to her about Government policies as they apply to constituents of hon. Members on both sides of the House. The question was put to her because the position was not clear. No one has been putting about any rubbish in Scotland, and I am sorry that she has addressed me in that tone. She would do better simply to give us the facts. If she stuck to that, perhaps she would manage to win some support for herself in the country.

Mrs. Currie: I always listen to advice, even from Opposition Members. However, if the hon. Gentleman had even tried to consult members of NALGO, his own

union, they would have given him the facts as I have given them. Indeed, if he had listened to the speeches of my right hon. and hon. Friends in Scotland, he would have heard the same many times.

I listened to what was said by the Association of London Authorities. I felt that I would much rather the authorities used their rates in London to look after local ratepayers—for example, by improving services in the community which might assist patients being discharged from hospital—and not go poking around looking for very thin material to make political points that do no service whatever to the House.

The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) waxed eloquent about democracy. He impressed me during the Committee stage of the Bill because it was clear that he was one of the few Opposition Members who had read the Bill and the White Paper, and he kept surprising himself by saying that he agreed with most of it. We appreciate that very much. Perhaps, however, the hon. Gentleman has not quite understood the new clause. I know that his name was not on it, so perhaps he was not consulted in the way that Opposition Members like.

The effect of subsection (1) would be to undermine the powers established under section 17 of the National Health Service Act 1977 and the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978 whereby the Secretaries of State can ensure the cost-effective delivery of the whole range of hospital services. Instead, health authorities and health boards would be permitted to act independently of central initiatives for domestic services, and would be able to choose to ignore the Secretaries of State. That is not acceptable, and is not in the interests of either patients or taxpayers.

The powers that the new clause seeks to annul were provided by a Labour Government. They are wise and essential, and we want to retain them. On that basis, I feel that the hon. Gentleman has got himself in a bit of a twist. The approach of the sponsors of the new clause is very disappointing, particularly because other Opposition Members are trying to be much more helpful.

I do not know whether hon. Members on either side of the House were able to hear the Leader of the Opposition taking part in a discussion over the weekend, which I thought very interesting and helpful. He said that not all public service was good and that not all private service was bad. That is entirely sensible and right and I commend that kind of approach—and perhaps some of that style—to the hon. Gentleman.

Competitive tendering arouses strong feelings. That is a pity because, in the end, it is a method of achieving better service and better value for money. Competitive tendering is of proven value. More than £100 million has been saved and ploughed back into other patient services. There is also much greater emphasis now on setting and achieving standards in all these hotel services, and on tighter budgetary discipline and more flexible forms of provision. Eighty per cent. of the domestic service tenders to which this clause refers have been won in-house and, on average, costs have fallen by 23 per cent. That is a tribute to the managers concerned, most of whom are members of NALGO, and perhaps most of all to their staff, most of whom are members of NUPE and COHSE.

Mr. Galbraith: The Minister has used the same figure mentioned in my speech—that £100 million had been saved in England and Wales through privatisation. Does she agree that the savings made in Scotland from the agreement trade unions have with the health boards without privatisation is £20 million, which is equivalent to double the savings in England and Wales?

Mrs. Currie: I heard what was said by the hon. Gentleman the first time because, whatever my public reputation might be, I do listen and I have an answer ready for him. He spoke of a figure of £20 million saved in Scotland. That is the accumulated figure over a number of years in Scotland.

Mr. Galbraith: Over how many years?

Mrs. Currie: The figure of more than £100 million is the English annual saving, and so the two are not exactly comparable. Even so, I cannot see what the hon. Gentleman is so upset about. The money goes straight back into the National Health Service for patient care. That involves employing people, too, and it involves looking after patients.

Indeed, when it comes to the matter of employment and the point made by the hon. Member for Wakefield the National Health Service has more than done its bit in recent years. It now employs some 1¼ million people, which is not only a national record but makes it the biggest employer in western Europe. The NHS now employs far more people than it did in the days when Labour last lost its grip on power, which I believe was way back in 1979.

We are now starting the second round of tendering in England. Progress is being made in Wales, and the first round is under way in Scotland. All the health boards in Scotland are now engaged in the preparatory work that is necessary before seeking tenders. Indeed, I understand that some tenders have already been let. We expect that the exercise will be as fruitful in Scotland as elsewhere, and to the benefit of patients.

The total amount involved in respect of domestic services in Scotland is more than £50 million, and if the savings are even close to those we have experienced elsewhere many millions of pounds are likely to be involved.

The same fears that have been expressed today were expressed in England some time ago when our competitive tendering exercise began. They proved to be unfounded. We believe they will prove to be unfounded in Scotland as well. We deplore the methods by which some views have been expressed outside.

Due to industrial action in Scotland, some 3,500 operations have been cancelled; 3,500 Scots people are suffering unnecessarily. Knowing hon. Members as I do, I doubt very much whether some of them—at least the hon. Members for Strathkelvin and Bearsden and for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth—are proud of the fact that 3,500 Scots people have been suffering unnecessarily. They did not intend that it should happen, but it has. During the recent industrial inaction, 90,000 meals were disrupted in Scottish hospitals. I am sure the food there is very good—certainly it was when I was in Scotland recently—but it helps patients if the food is actually served and if meal times are not disrupted.

We strongly agree about the importance of public health and hygiene and we have taken strong action in the past 18 months to safeguard hygiene standards throughout Britain through sections 1 and 2 of the National Health Service (Amendment) Act 1986. It gave

[Mrs. Currie]

me great pleasure, as one of my first tasks at the Dispatch Box, to be involved in the passage of that legislation. The result has been a greater awareness of locally determined control of infection policies and improved understanding and collaboration between health staff, environmental health officers and health and safety inspectors, many of whom are members of NALGO.

All health authorities have responsibility for maintaining standards, whoever does the work. We have no plans to change that system. I note the comment of Opposition Members about private companies, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) hinted, all the successful prosecutions since the removal of Crown immunity have concerned in-house, not private, contracts. We want the highest standards whoever does the work and we hold the health authorities responsible.

The hon. Member for Wakefield commented on catering standards in his constituency. Let me gently remind him that it was the appalling events in the kitchens of one of the hospitals there which were perpetrated by NHS staff and which resulted in a number of deaths of patients which resulted in the changes in the law that I have just described. The health authority in Wakefield was responsible then for the standards achieved—if that is what one could call them—and it is responsible now for the standards that are achieved, and we shall continue to hold it responsible.

Mr. Hinchliffe: The Minister should look again at the inquiry report on the Stanley Royd hospital, because she does not seem to have grasped exactly what it said. It referred to the conditions in the kitchen, which had nothing to do with the staff. The appalling fact was that they were working in an old workhouse building because of lack of investment in the NHS. The Minister might also care to comment on the fact that the new £1 million kitchen has been ready for a year but has not been used because of cuts in the NHS.

Mrs. Currie: I have just made my comments about the previous incident and about current catering in Wakefield. The health authority is responsible and will continue to be so.

The new clause seeks to destroy the initiative being shown by Ministers, health authorities and boards in our aim, which I think that some Opposition Members would share, to combine high quality service with value for money. Dare I suggest that some of the dislike of competitive tendering of NUPE and one or two other unions stems from a dislike of open competition, a fear of public scrutiny and a concern about the subsequent disappearance of the so-called Spanish practices which have plagued the NHS for far too long. The fact that the system in England is working should not upset them so, but it upsets NUPE and COHSE because they have most to lose.

We are pleased to see the success of competitive tendering and we do not intend to let that be damaged or destroyed in the way proposed. If Opposition Members decide to press the new clause to a vote, we shall vote it down.

Mr. Norman Hogg: Opposition Members have listened carefully to the Minister. I regret that we are far from persuaded that she is anything other than just a believer in what she says, but cannot really substantiate it with fact. Her figure of £100 million, which we have heard endlessly, has been challenged time and again, whereas the figure of £20 million, which has been produced for Scotland, has not been satisfactorily dealt with. That figure was founded on trade union agreements, not on privatisation.

However, the Opposition have come to understand that we are never able to persuade the Government of anything because they have closed minds. They do not believe in the NHS, they voted against its formation in the late 1940s, and they are destroying it now. We shall not let them do it and we shall press our new clause to a vote.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—
The House divided: Ayes 202, Noes 307.

Division No. 256] **[11.30 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian

Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mrs. Llin Golding.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*

Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 8

PRESCRIPTION BY NURSES

'The following sub-paragraph shall be substituted for subsection (2)(a) of section 55 of the Medicines Act 1968 (exemptions for doctors, dentists, veterinary surgeons and veterinary practitioners)—

"(i) to the sale or supply of all medicinal products that are not prescription only medicines, where the product is sold or supplied by a registered nurse of a category specified in an order made by the Health Ministers for the purposes of this paragraph in the course of her professional practice;

(ii) and to the sale or supply of prescription only medicines which, by virtue of an exemption conferred by an order made under section 58(4)(a), may be sold or supplied by a registered nurse of a category specified in an order made by the Health Ministers for the purposes of this paragraph, otherwise than in accordance with a prescription given by an appropriate practitioner; or".'.—*[Sir David Price.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this, it will be convenient to take new clause 9—*Nursing practitioners*—

'In subsection (1) of section 29 of the National Health Service Act 1977 (general medical services), there shall be inserted the words "and nursing" after the word "medical" (both in "medical practitioners" and in "personal medical services").

The following subsection shall be inserted after subsection (8) of section 29 of the National Health Service Act 1977:

"(9) Regulations may provide—

(a) for the definition, registration and remuneration of nursing practitioners;

(b) for the definition of the personal nursing services to be provided and for securing that the arrangements will be such that all persons availing themselves of those services will receive adequate personal care and attention;

(c) for conferring a right on any person to choose, in accordance with the prescribed procedure, the nursing practitioner to whom he is to be attended, subject to the consent of the practitioner so chosen and to any prescribed limit on the number of patients to be accepted by the practitioner;

(d) for any additional arrangements the Secretary of State may deem to be necessary for the adequate provision of personal nursing services.".'.

Sir David Price: New clauses 8 and 9 stand on the Notice Paper in my name and the names of a number of hon. Members who, the House will agree, cover a very wide spectrum of opinion in the House. I hope that this will make the new clauses appeal to hon. Members—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I wonder whether we might have a little order in the Chamber so that I can at least hear the hon. Member who is moving this motion.

Sir David Price: As I was endeavouring to tell the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, new clause 8 pertains to the power of nurses to prescribe. New clause 9 is directed towards nursing practitioners and is relevant to new clause 8. I wish to say a few words in support of each proposition. I am conscious of the desire of the House at this hour to make fairly rapid progress, so I shall endeavour to be brief.

The matter of nurse prescribing is not new. I remind the House that at present nurses have no power to prescribe even simple drugs and appliances, including pain-killers which can be bought over a pharmacist's counter. Frequently, district nurses and other nursing staff working in the community waste a considerable amount of time obtaining for their patients items such as new dressings. They must first obtain a prescription from the doctor, who may never have seen the patient in question, then obtain the item from the pharmacist, and take it back to the patient. Delays in treatment and inconvenience to patients can thus occur. Nursing time and travelling costs are wasted.

In many instances, the community nurse is, in reality, the prescriber and the general practitioner merely authorises what she advises. Similarly, many community nurses have special expertise in the care of terminally ill patients and are quite capable of using their professional judgment on matters such as varying the timing and dosage of pain-relieving drugs prescribed by doctors.

The House will be aware that the increasing development of primary health care teams is breaking down the old division between doctors, traditionally responsible for prescribing, and nurses, traditionally responsible only for administering treatment. With the recognition that individuals from different health professions can provide effective care to patients on their own, responsibility becomes a team rather than an individual approach.

I remind the House that some groups of nurses, including occupational health nurses, midwives, and some nurses in the armed forces, already have the powers that we are seeking in the new clause. We are attempting to extend to nurses the power to prescribe. That was one of the recommendations of the Cumberlege report and of our own Social Services Select Committee report. I remind the House that paragraph 61 states:

"We recommend that the Government introduce legislation to permit nurses with appropriate training limited powers to prescribe and in defined circumstances to modify dosage."

In their primary health care White Paper, "Promoting Better Health", the Government responded favourably to that general proposition, stating that they will

"consult the Professional Standing Advisory Committees about the professional and ethical issues of prescribing by nurses with a view to producing appropriate guidance."

The new clause offers my right hon. Friend an opportunity to respond to his own White Paper and to our recommendations. I know that there is legal discussion as to whether amendments in primary legislation are necessary.

There is a view that all we seek in the new clause can be done by my right hon. Friend under existing powers, by statutory instrument. I am advised that there is doubt about that and that it needs a change in substantive legislation. We are seeking the opportunity of the Bill to get the primary legislation put on the statute book, although the details are obviously still open to negotiation, and it would have to be implemented in the form of a statutory instrument in due course.

I hope that I have said enough at this hour to make the case for new clause 8.

I turn briefly to new clause 9, which flows from it, and again relates to the changing role of nurses. I can put the case most succinctly by quoting paragraph 59 of the Select Committee report on primary health care, which stated:

"Nurse practitioners are a relatively new concept in the UK. Other countries such as the USA and most developing countries have had such an element in their medical services for many years. In the UK there is no precise definition at present of their role. At one extreme we have been told that health centres could be run entirely by nurse practitioners. Others see nurse practitioners as more akin to health visitors or district nurses, providing a mainly preventive and health education role. It is clear that with better education of nurses and as primary health care teams develop, the role of nurses is changing fast."

It is that which has led some of my hon. Friends and myself to push the question with my right hon. Friend. He will know that in Birmingham a research project was set up in 1982 to test the hypothesis behind the concept of nurse practitioners. It was found that nurse practitioners had a valuable role in a number of areas: first, acting as an alternative consultant for the patient; secondly, screening for serious disease and abnormal physical signs and symptoms; thirdly, the management and treatment of minor and chronic ailments and injuries; fourthly, and most important, the health education of the patient; and fifthly, counselling.

As I think the House knows, the surveys which were done at the time of the Cumberlege report, and in a way for the report, supported the proposition that more of us would rather discuss our health problems with a nurse than with a doctor. I could go through the figures but the hour is late.

I hope that I have said enough to indicate that we are concerned about the development of nurse practitioners and that we feel that they have a positive role to play in the scheme of things, particularly when there is more emphasis on care in the community, on the primary care team and, above all, on good health rather than on running just a sickness service.

Ms. Harman: I support the new clauses and thank the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) for proposing them. I hope that the Government will take them as a spur to action. We have had a lot a discussion about points of controversy and agreement has been reached. The arguments in favour of limited nurse prescribing and of recognising and institutionalising the role of the nurse practitioner have been well advanced.

As the hon. Member said, with the development of care in the community the work of both the nurse prescriber and the nurse practitioner will be even more necessary. We had a debate earlier about cervical cancer screening. If the nurse practitioner were to carry out smear tests, that would be a useful role.

I hope that we shall hear from the Minister that the Government intend to take action about nurse prescribing and nursing practitioners. We want to hear about specific action, hopefully with a timetable. The discussion should move to a close and we should see action on these two important issues.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I echo the remarks of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) and congratulate the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) on bringing forward the two new clauses. I was surprised to hear him say that he thought that primary legislation might be necessary. That is not my under-standing from reading the detail of the Medicines Act 1986. In sections 55(2) and 58 there seem to be prima facie powers available to the Government to carry out the proposals in the new clauses. Midwives and occupational health nurses are allowed, in certain constrained circumstances, to prescribe items from the general sales list and some prescription-only medicines. No one is suggesting that there should be anything other than careful training and limitations on the powers.

All the evidence available to the experts and commentators shows that the profession is developing substantially in that direction. To move along the lines suggested in the new clause would recognise established best practice. The matter was considered in the Cumberlege report and by the Select Committee. The primary care White Paper considered it in principle, too. There should be no difficulty about the principle of limited nurse prescription and nursing practitioners.

There is some evidence that the Government are dragging their feet somewhat on the issue. As the hon. Member for Peckham said, the purpose of the debate is to request the Government to tell us what the up-to-date situation is, and, if there are delays, to explain why they should take place. In particular, after the introductory remarks of the hon. Member for Eastleigh, the Government should tell us whether primary legislation is required. Obviously, the implementation of any schemes will be postponed until parliamentary time is available.

Had the hour been earlier, we could have had a much more substantial debate on the detail and practice that are to be worked out. On that basis, my right hon. and hon. Friends and I support the principle and the need to develop the practice and to implement the new clauses.

Mr. Newton: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) on moving the new clause, even though I hope that he will not press it too far.

Indeed, I recall one of my early indiscretions, within a day or two of being appointed to my present position. On the radio I stated that nurse prescribing sounded rather a good idea, which caused quite a fit when I got back to the Department that morning. My view that it is rather a good idea has been strengthened in the intervening period. As my hon. Friend will know—we referred to this matter in the primary health care White Paper—we saw merit in giving nurses more freedom to prescribe a limited range of items, such as dressings, ointments and medical sprays, and to exercise their professional judgment on the timing and dosage of drugs prescribed by doctors for the relief of pain. It is not a matter of foot dragging, to pick up the point that was made by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood). We have not reached the point at which we can say, "This is what nurses should be able to prescribe and this is how the arrangements will work." But I am glad to be able to report to the House some further progress, which I hope will go further fairly soon.

Following an initial approach to the professional standing advisory committees—in the White Paper, we stated that we would do that—we are in the process of setting up a joint working party to examine the professional and ethical issues of nurse prescribing. We expect the working party to begin work next month. I hope that that will give the House some encouragement.

Frankly, it is not possible to say—I pick up some other remarks of my hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman—what, if any, legislative implications there will be, because we need to examine the work of the working party first. It is clear that we can do several things without primary legislation, but I could not put my hand on my heart and say that it is absolutely certain that all that one might want to do can be done without primary legislation.

Ms. Harman: Who is on the working party, and what will be the representation of nurses on it?

Mr. Newton: I cannot answer that question without notice, I am afraid. Should an appropriately armed carrier pigeon arrive from a certain quarter in the next moment or two, I shall see whether I can get the message off its leg. Otherwise, I shall see what information can be provided to the hon. Lady and, indeed, to other hon. Members by some other means.

I have to be just a fraction less forthcoming about the concept of nurse practitioners. *[Interruption.]* Before dealing with that, however, I shall return to nurse prescribing. I cannot give names, but the answer to the question asked by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) is that there will be three nurses from the standing nurses' and midwives' advisory committee, two pharmacists from the standing pharmaceutical advisory committee and two doctors from the standing medical advisory committee, plus a chairman. Therefore, while it would not be quite right to say that the nurses will have a majority, there will be more of them than of anyone else, and I think that that position will be regarded as reasonable.

12 midnight

I am equally sympathetic to the general principle of nurse practitioners, as the White Paper and the circular that the Government issued following the Cumberlege report suggested, but it is a more difficult subject because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh acknowledged by implication—or perhaps even explicitly—in his remarks, the concept is not frightfully well defined. Our first problem, therefore, is to define exactly what we mean by the phrase "nurse practitioner" which we all tend to use in rather generalised terms. The Department is continuing work—again not with the aim of dragging its feet—with a view to deciding how best the work of agreeing a clearer definition can be carried forward with the professions. I shall certainly ensure that that work is undertaken as fast as it reasonably can be, but I cannot say much more this evening.

I hope that I have conveyed to the House the Government's continuing sympathy for the concepts, the further progress that we hope to make fairly rapidly in relation to nurse prescribing and the fact that we have by no means forgotten the concept of the nurse practitioner.

Sir David Price: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. I was encouraged by what he had to tell the House about the working party. I hope that he will be able to persuade it to put a time limit on its discussions, because there is nothing like a time limit to settle the mind. I can imagine the various bodies concerned going on indefinitely, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will get them to agree at their first meeting a time by which they will report. I shall, of course, expect my right hon. Friend to tell us the results. He will certainly have our support if any primary legislation is needed, although I very much hope that provision can be made by statutory instrument under existing legislation.

I am encouraged by what my right hon. Friend said about new clause 9, to which I also spoke. It is rather urgent to get a proper definition because the subject has a bearing on the future supply of nurses, nurses' career structure and training and, ultimately, pay for extra responsibility for nurses. The concept is therefore relevant. In considering demographic forecasts of the number of young people with the necessary qualifications coming out of our schools, we must take more very much more seriously than hitherto the optimisation of nurses' professional qualifications. The concept of the nurse practioner is primarily directed towards that.

With those few remarks, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 17

COMPLAINTS (DEPARTMENTAL HOSPITALS)

'(1) Subject to subsection (2) below, the provisions of the Hospital Complaints Procedures Act 1985 shall apply to hospitals directly managed by the Department of Health and Social Security as though they were managed by a health authority.

(2) The Secretary of State shall, after consulting such bodies as appear to him to represent the interests of the public within the National Health Service, by order made by statutory instrument establish Regulations for the application of the provisions of that Act to enable it to apply to those hospitals.

(3) A statutory instrument under subsection (2) shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Fearn.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Fearn: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss new clause 19—*Complaints (Ministry of Defence Hospitals)*

'—(1) Subject to subsection (2) below, the provisions of the Hospital Complaints Procedures Act, 1985, shall apply to hospitals managed by the Ministry of Defence as though they were managed by a health authority;

(2) The Secretary of State for Defence shall, after consulting such bodies as appear to him to represent the interests of the public within the National Health Service, by order made by statutory instrument establish Regulations for the application of the provisions of that Act to enable it to apply to those hospitals;

(3) A statutory instrument under subsection (2) shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.

Mr. Fearn: The Hospital Complaints Procedures Act 1985 has the potential to be a very useful piece of legislation. It is unfortunate that we are still awaiting its implementation and that consultation on the details of its implementation has taken so long. Perhaps the Minister will be able to report some progress in his reply. However, one limitation that has seemed to me unnecessary has been the restriction of its operation to hospitals managed by health authorities.

The new clauses seek to extend the terms of the Act to two other kinds of hospital. New clause 17 would extend the legislation to cover hospitals directly managed by the DHSS. These are the special hospitals, and the top security Park Lane hospital, which I recently visited, is one such hospital. The work of the Mental Health Act Commission is of great importance in this context, but it still seems appropriate to include provision for management to take action in the same way as the management of health authorities are required to take action in mainstream hospitals.

New clause 19 would extend the legislation to cover Ministry of Defence hospitals. As far as I can see, there is no justification for saying that an NHS patient who is receiving treatment in such a hospital, probably as a result of an NHS arrangement, should not be accorded the same rights as other NHS patients.

The new clause enables anyone to debate the rights of service men who complain about things that could go wrong. It seems entirely wrong that a member of the armed services should have inadequate protection against problems that have nothing whatever to do with his employment. The problems covered by the new clause are cases in point. At this stage there is a need to be prescriptive on that more general issue. The matter can be debated before the regulations are laid under the new clause.

The Government should have no difficulty in accepting these proposals. We are sure that the Government do not reject the view that all patients should have equal rights, without arbitrary distinction.

Mrs. Currie: As the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) said, his new clause seeks to apply the provision of directions issued under the Hospital Complaints Procedure Act 1985. He may know that I was associated with that Act, because, as a Back Bencher, among other things, I took it through the House on Third Reading. I agree with the hon. Gentleman's implication that it is a useful and valuable piece of legislation.

We are about to issue a circular to the National Health Service. It has been delayed to secure final consultation with the Health Service Commissioner, the ombudsman, and the joint consultants' committee. Comments have been received and it is planned shortly to issue the circular under that legislation. Very minor modifications to the text of the circular are being made. It is expected that the directions will come into effect possibly in June or July. Of course sufficient time must be given for the health authorities to prepare for their responsibilities under the Act.

New clause 17 is unnecessary. The directions will apply to hospitals managed by the Department of Health and Social Security. They will be required to follow the provisions of the Act in exactly the same way as hospitals in the National Health Service. Therefore, it is not necessary to establish a separate statutory instrument for the special hospitals. They will be covered by the Act, the circular and the directions that we are about to issue.

New clause 19 deals with Ministry of Defence hospitals. Each hospital for which the Ministry of Defence is responsible already has well established procedures under which complaints may be made by or on behalf of patients at that hospital. These complaints are taken very seriously and are thoroughly investigated either locally or by the Ministry of Defence itself. Booklets explaining these procedures are supplied to patients on admission to hospital and notices giving information on the complaints procedures are displayed in out-patient areas at each hospital.

Although Ministry of Defence hospitals do not come within the provisions of the National Health Service Act 1946, the Ministry's complaints procedures were reviewed in the light of the provisions of the Hospital Complaints Procedures Act. It was concluded at that time that while the provisions of the Act were not binding on the Ministry of Defence, they had already been implemented by the Ministry. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence tells me that he is satisfied that these arrangements ensure that patients treated in Ministry of Defence hospitals have adequate means by which to make complaints. On that basis, we feel that new clause 19 is also unnecessary and the hon. Gentleman might not wish to press it.

Mr. Fearn: In view of what the Minister said, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 18

ALLOWANCES

'(1) It shall be a duty of the Secretary of State for Scotland to allot to each Health Board, after consultation with that board and with such bodies as appear to him to represent the interest of the public in the area of the Board within the National Health Service, an additional allocation sufficient to meet the cost of allowances paid pursuant to subsection (2).

(2) The Secretary of State shall by order made by Statutory Instruments provide that allowances in addition to any allowances otherwise payable be paid to general medical practitioners satisfying criteria:

(a) in respect of the density of the population served in the area served by the practise, or part of such area;

(b) in respect of the number of principals and assistants practising therein;

(c) in respect of such other considerations as seem to him to be appropriate.

(3) A Statutory Instrument under subsection (2) shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Kirkwood.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Kirkwood: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I should explain the purpose of the new clause from the outset because its wording does not make it as clear as it might be. It is an attempt to focus attention briefly on the plight and potential difficulties faced by rural practitioners in Scotland.

Rural practitioners have problems throughout the length and breadth of the United Kingdom, but I think that the House would accept that, given the geographical disparate nature of large sections of the Scottish mainland, it is appropriate to focus attention specifically on the problems of rural practitioners in Scotland.

The problems faced by general practitioners in Scotland relate, as much as anything else, to the question of list size. We know that the United Kingdom target is an average list size of 1,700 for general practitioners. In Scotland that is the average list size but the figure is due largely to the number or rural practitioners in the highlands and islands who have extremely small lists because of the nature of the geographical area they cover. In our urban and deprived inner city areas the list sizes remain too high and there is a need for more general practitioners.

I had an interesting answer to a question that I tabled some time ago. It gave the number of small practices in Scotland. I was told that at 1 October 1986, the latest date for which information was available, there were 779 doctors with a list size of less than 1,000, 982 with a list size of less than 1,200 and 1,316 with a list size of less than 1,500. Therefore, there is a difficulty about the list size in rural practices.

Having a large number of rural practices—often single-handed practices—with such small lists there are certain peculiar difficulties for the doctors. The proposals contained in the new clause and the thinking behind it seek to redress some of the working conditions they face, particularly the direct reimbursement of local allowances for GPs taking study leave, the introduction of functional group allowances and special assistance to enable doctors to take on a partner. That is the background and provenance of the new clause.

I was prompted to table the clause, having received a letter from a Dr. Macleod in Inverness, whose permission I sought to advise the House of the contents of the letter he sent earlier this year. He said:

"We have a relatively small list, so have never expected to make as much money as most of our colleagues. We have, however, time to give to our patients. We cover an area from Smithton to Brodie and Dulcie Bridge to Fort George. Our practice area includes the high risk areas of Dalcross Airport, McDermotts (Scotland)"—

which is a fabrication and construction yard—

"and the A96. For the convenience of our patients we operate branch surgeries in Croy and Nairn. We have patients in the local GP hospital and cover there for casualty. We have a Recall System for cervical smears and a Call Up system for immunisations. We provide a Well Woman Clinic and a Well Man Clinic. We undertake some minor surgery. We have a policy of regularly visiting our elderly patients. To avoid the unacceptable delays experienced elsewhere we have not operated an appointments system. We are each available for consultation for an average of 75 hours per week and many more during normal holiday periods. We do not delegate any of our work to deputies. We are a teaching practice.

We think we run a good practice. Geographically there is no scope for increasing our list size. For whatever reason, the patient demand is increasing well beyond that which one would expect from the pathology exhibited.

In recognition of all this the proposals on list size in the White Paper will cut our income by something between £4,000 and £11,500."

During discussions with Dr. Macleod it became clear that the implications for some practices in Scotland, which are small by United Kingdom standards, were severe indeed. I wonder whether the Government understand the full implications of their proposals.

The new clause aims to make a reality of what the Government claim as being their target in their White Paper, "Promoting Better Health," to try to help rural areas. Far from helping rural areas, cash limiting general practices and plans to increase the size of lists and surgery hours before they qualify for basic practice allowances will have a devastating effect, particularly in Scotland. Under the new clause, the Secretary of State for Scotland would be forced to take into account the large number of rural practices, which are often single-handed practices.

12.15 am

GPs who work in isolation, such as Dr. Macleod and his colleagues, must spend more time working for their patients than their urban colleagues because of increased travelling and home visiting. They have little contact with colleagues and experience difficulty in obtaining time off. Rural GPs often play a wider role, as I know from my constituency work, by substituting for other services that are lacking in rural areas.

The new clause would require an additional allocation to be made, which would include inducement payments to cover the cost of employing high-calibre partners, study leave and improvements to surgery and medical facilities. This would ensure that GPs and their patients in isolated areas do not suffer professionally.

Rural primary care saves resources by prevention and treatment in the community. The Government do not understand this matter and do not appreciate the needs and difficulties of isolated practices. If the new clause were to be accepted, it would go some way to addressing those problems and to improving health care for people in remote communities.

I understand that some of these subjects are being discussed and that the Government are still considering what to do to confront the problems. I urge the Minister —a man for whom I have a high regard, even in Scottish matters—to take these matters seriously and to ensure that we get a fair deal and proper allocation for GP services in rural areas.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I support the new clause, because it relates to a matter about which I have received representations. The Minister should give attention to those representations.

The matter has been brought to my attention by a single-handed practitioner in my constituency who has been trying to promote the collective development of his practice along with neighbouring single-handed practioners—one in my constituency and two in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith). He has been suggesting that it would be much better for individual practices and their patients to join forces to recruit a partner to the four practices to provide cover when the GPs are away on study leave or holiday.

The obvious advantage is that patients would know the doctor standing in for their normal doctor in a way that they could not know a locum who has been brought in for short-term purposes. I think that the Minister will acknowledge that what tends to happen is that patients suddenly manage to contain their illness when their doctor is away, unless it is desperately urgent. When their doctor returns from study leave or holiday, he has a huge queue of patients who were not willing to see a locum whom they did not know. That is the essence of human nature and I think that the Minister will understand that that is what happens.

It seems to me that the proposal of that practitioner and his colleagues is sensible and practical. It will help his practice, neighbouring practices and patients. Yet so far he has been unable to get support from the Scottish Office for his suggestion.

When I first raised the matter with the Scottish Office, officials replied that they were not able to support the proposal because it was likely to be rather more expensive to operate than allowing each individual practitioner to retain his own locum. I then asked the Scottish Office to give an indication of the breakdown of costs, and the officials said that they had analysed the costs and there was no significant difference between supporting the doctors' wishes and simply requiring them to continue with the existing practice of hiring locums as and when they needed them.

We managed to debunk the argument that it would necessarily cost more, although the new clause states that, even if there is a cost, it should be supported. In spite of having proved that particular point, the Scottish Office continues to resist this practical and constructive suggestion.

I am sure that the situation is not peculiar to Scotland. There are parts of England to which this suggestion would be relevant and helpful. I have been mystified as to why it has been resisted so far, as indeed have the doctors in question, who feel that they are making a constructive suggestion in the best interests of their own working practices and of their patients.

I believe that the new clause is sensible and constructive. It will not necessarily lead to enormous costs, and it will ultimately ensure that there is good health provision in thinly populated areas.

It is not always easy to get dedicated doctors to come to rural areas and operate a single-handed practice. Only a particular type of doctor is willing to take that on. Doctors have come in and have not survived. Within a year or two they have felt unable to sustain the practice. With no disrespect to the doctors who have come to rural areas, it is interesting to note that two of the four practitioners that I mentioned are not British. They are very good doctors, they are very welcome and we are very glad to have them, but that situation is indicative of how difficult it is to attract people into those practices. The new clause would go a long way towards maintaining viable practices, ensuring that practitioners can have some relief from the constant pressure and can work with neighbouring practitioners in a constructive and helpful way.

I hope that the Minister will take on board this suggestion. If he cannot accept the new clause tonight—we understand that—I hope that he will undertake to consider the thinking behind it and come back at a later stage having considered it. The proposals are constructive and serious and certainly should not be rejected out of hand.

Mr. Galbraith: When I first read the new clause, I was unclear as to its exact intent, but, having heard the explanation, its purpose is now clear to me. I am not sure that the new clause would fulfil all its intentions. Heaven forbid that amateur drafters such as ourselves should always be able to do that. However, the intention is excellent and we should like to record our support of it.

It is a problem in rural areas, particularly in the highlands and islands and other parts of Scotland, but I am sure that it is also an important issue for some parts of England. A constant problem that affects general practitioners and surgeons who are on continuous 24-hour call for seven days a week is the inability to get away and go to postgraduate meetings. I realise that the new clause applies not to hospital doctors working single-handedly but only to general practitioners, but the principle is extremely important.

Numerous ways have been considered to give doctors working in such practices time off so that they can keep up to date with what is happening in medicine and have some relief from being on call for 24 hours. When they go home at night, they never know whether they will have to go out again. There is no respite from the continual ringing of the telephone. Various methods have been tried, and a roving practitioner was used for a while, but that did not really work.

The purpose behind the new clause is that money should be provided for various things that general practitioners now have to provide for themselves. My hon. Friends and I support the new clause.

Mr. Newton: I have to confess that the Government and I collectively face the same difficulty as was experienced by the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith)—that we had not spotted the purpose of the new clause. Most of my brief is therefore scrap paper. I do not think that a carrier pigeon will come to my rescue on this occasion.

I am encouraged by what has been said about the new clause. We thought that it amounted to a general attack on the system of reimbursing general practitioners that was proposed in the White Paper, but I now understand it to be a perfectly rational suggestion about how the system should be geared to meet the particular problems of particular areas. The suggestion is just as relevant to some parts of England as it is to some parts of Scotland.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) kindly said that he would understand if I was unable to accept the new clause. I am unable to do so, but I shall ensure that the points that he has made are sympathetically considered. It is not for me to commit the Scottish Office, but I have no doubt that my colleagues there will want to study what has been said, and I undertake to do so in relation to England.

I hope that it will be encouraging if I point to two quite clear-cut references in the White Paper to our awareness of the problem. I shall not weary the House by reading them at length, but paragraph 3.38, which refers to the possible introduction of a new allowance for areas of deprivation, goes on in the next sentence to say:

[Mr. Newton]

"The effect of these arrangements will be examined and if necessary other changes in the remuneration system will be introduced, for instance to help doctors in sparsely populated areas."

Paragraph 3.39, which is side-headed "Rural Areas," deals with the extent to which doctors, especially those who practise single-handed in rural areas, can be affected by a number of factors that can contribute to professional and social isolation. The final sentence reads:

"To take account of the particular pressures on these doctors, the Government will examine, in consultation with the profession, the scope for introducing measures aimed at alleviating their social and professional isolation, for example so that they may have more opportunities to attend post-graduate courses."

I hope that the spirit of those positive commitments in the White Paper, which are very much in line with the generality of what hon. Members have been urging on me, demonstrates that the Government are willing to look seriously at the points that they have raised.

Mr. Kirkwood: We have stumbled on a new tactic. If the Minister is naturally a fairly reasonable chap, the obvious tactic is to table a completely incomprehensible amendment that he has to think through for himself and to which he then, without any help from his civil servants, has to respond. It is a ploy that can be developed and used on future occasions.

I appreciate what the Minister said, but at the risk of appearing churlish I hope that he will not mind if I press the new clause to a Division. It will demonstrate the importance that we attach to the subject. I understand that conversations are to take place, but a Division may help to concentrate people's minds. I propose therefore to press the new clause to a Division.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 43, Noes 194.

Division No. 257] **[12.30 am**

AYES

Ashdown, Paddy
Beith, A. J.
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Galbraith, Sam
Graham, Thomas
Harman, Ms Harriet
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Mowlam, Marjorie
Pike, Peter L.
Robertson, George
Rooker, Jeff
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Turner, Dennis
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. Ronnie Fearn.

NOES

Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Gill, Christopher
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Heddle, John
Hind, Kenneth
Holt, Richard
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis

Summerson, Hugo	Ward, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*	Warren, Kenneth
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*	Wells, Bowen
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*	Wheeler, John
Thurnham, Peter	Whitney, Ray
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*	Widdecombe, Ann
Tredinnick, David	Wilshire, David
Trippier, David	Winterton, Mrs Ann
Trotter, Neville	Winterton, Nicholas
Twinn, Dr Ian	Wood, Timothy
Vaughan, Sir Gerard	
Waddington, Rt Hon David	Tellers for the Noes:
Wakeham, Rt Hon John	Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Walden, George	Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 22

ALLOCATION TO REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITIES

'It shall be a duty of the Secretary of State each year to allocate to each Regional Health Authority and to each Family Practitioner Committee in England an allocation sufficient to meet the costs of existing services, including the increase in costs arising from pay rises and price inflation on National Health Service purchases.'.—*[Mr. Fearn.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Fearn: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second Time.

New clause 22 seeks to establish the principle that the Government have a duty to maintain the funding of the NHS at least in real terms. That has not happened in the past. Despite Government rhetoric, often at its most strident during Prime Minister's Question Time, the fact is that the NHS is suffering from cumulative underfunding over the years.

For example, the Government have repeatedly argued that their so-called efficiency savings are the same as providing new money for the NHS. That is palpably untrue. The repeated failure of the Government fully to fund NHS pay awards to which they have consented and their failure to recognise the full effect of price rises in NHS supplies have meant that health authorities have been squeezed. People working on the ground know from their own experience that the Government's claims do not reflect reality.

Moreover, there are particularly regional problems. The principle of equalising the level of health service available throughout the country is correct, but whereas the resource allocation working party strategy was established on the assumption that the provision would be levelled up, the Government have turned it into a matter of robbing Peter to pay Paul.

The new clause would prevent the worst effects of Government policy. I should have liked to write into the new clause a duty for the Government to fund the additional demands for services from the increasing number of elderly people in the population and for improving clinical techniques, generally estimated at about 2 per cent. per year at present. However, the drafting of such a provision would inevitably be complex and almost certainly flawed. Therefore, I have compromised by including the words "at least".

The formula set out in the new clause is not intended as a ceiling; it is merely a floor. The purpose of the new clause parallels that of the so-called Rooker-Wise amendment for personal taxation. It sets a basic demand for NHS funding, any breach of which would require primary legislation. We believe that the extra protection which would result from the fear of adverse publicity will protect the NHS generally, and each regional health authority and family practitioner committee in particular, from the worst potential effects of Government policies. I commend the clause to the House.

Mrs. Currie: One effect of the new clause would be to impose on the Secretary of State a statutory obligation to anticipate the effects of NHS pay and price inflation in determining the financial allocations to regional health authorities and family practitioner committees. No sensible employer would ever guarantee to pay in advance all and any pay bill without knowing what it amounted to. We await the reports of the review bodies on pay, and when they have reported and the various details have been gathered in my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will make a statement.

Generally speaking, the hon. Gentleman should be aware that the new clause, which we reject, would signal a return to volume planning throughout the public sector. The success of the Government's medium-term financial strategy, in particular the reduction of public expenditure as a proportion of gross domestic product, is based on the discipline of cash planning and the adherence, wherever possible, to cash limits.

12.45 am

If accepted, the clause would reduce the Government's flexibility in reaching decisions on public expenditure programmes as a whole by pre-empting money for the health services ahead of, for example, programmes for pensions, and would remove the cash planning controls that have been such a successful feature of the Government's management of the economy.

In any event, the clause is not practicable. The effects of pay and price inflation cannot be measured until after the end of the financial year in question. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State could, therefore, perform the statutory duty that would be imposed on him by the clause only by ensuring a substantial margin of over-provision.

There has been concern about the uncertainty created because health authorities enter the financial year before the review body recommendations are finalised. We have responded to that. As the Chief Secretary to the Treasury announced on 24 February, the Government are taking steps to change the timetable from 1989 for deciding the pay review body awards to provide greater certainty for health authorities when they draw up their budgets. We hope that decisions on the 1988 awards will be made shortly, but in future years the timetable will be brought forward and we hope that decisions will be announced by the end of January.

The basis of the Government's economic strategy to which I have just referred has given us the low inflation and rapid growth which have enabled us to fund the National Health Service to record levels, to employ record numbers of staff and to look after record numbers of patients, both inside and outside the hospital service.

The new clause is uncalled for and not practicable, and I urge the House to reject it.

Question put and negatived.

New clause 23

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

'(1) Subject to subsection (2) below, the provisions of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1986, shall apply to Regional Health Authorities, District Health Authorities, Health Boards, Special Health Authorities and boards of Governors as they apply to local authorities.

(2) The Secretary of State shall by order made by statutory instrument establish regulations for the interpretation of the provisions of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act to the extent that is necessary for the Act to apply to the bodies specified in subsection (1).

(3) A statutory instrument under subsection (2) shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Fearn.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Fearn: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The clause seeks to bring open government into the Health Service. Health authorities spend billions of pounds of public money and comprise people of whom only a small minority are directly accountable to the public. The formal accountability to Parliament, through the Secretary of State, is remote and capable of being enforced only in a pinprick manner.

The clause seeks to establish a less formal but more effective form of public accountability, achieved by publicity. There is no justification for Health Service decisions being taken behind closed doors, except in the circumstances recognised by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985.

At present, different health authorities have different traditions of openness or otherwise, but in too many cases it remains the case, as used to apply in some local authorities, that administrative convenience or the wish to avoid embarassment is the real reason for choosing to debate an issue in private session.

I have noted the private Member's Bill of the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds), which makes similar provision in respect of community health councils. That is fine so far as it goes, especially if the Government are prepared to fund the additional costs which community health councils will incur, but management decisions are taken by health authorities. The public needs access to the proceedings and documents of the health authorities.

It is a principle, therefore, of good administration that decisions affecting people's lives should be taken in an open manner and that decisions on the spending of public money should be taken in public. It is that principle that the clause seeks to put into effect.

Mr. Newton: In saying why the Government do not feel able to accede immediately to the request of the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn), I wish to make the position as clear as possible. As I am sure he is aware, health authorities are already subject to the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.

Mr. Norman Hogg: Does the Minister know who put that on the statute book?

Mr. Newton: I know who was in the Government in 1960——

Mrs. Currie: It was our right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher).

Mr. Newton: —but I had not realised that it was my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister who put that measure on the statute book. That persuades me even further that it must have been a splendid Act.

The 1960 Act applies to health authorities and it requires them to give public notice of the time and place of the meeting with a notice on the door of the health authority office. Secondly, it requires them to supply copies of the agenda to any newspaper that requests it. Beyond that, some health authorities—although we are not sure that this is true of all—routinely send out agendas to newspapers and local radio. Thirdly, under the 1960 Act, they are required to open the meeting to the public.

The slight impression that the hon. Member for Southport conveyed of all health authorities operating without any constraint in a completely hole-and-corner fashion was something of an exaggeration.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Is the Minister aware that some health authorities regularly and routinely use the procedure of going into private session to discuss what are supposed to be private matters but which in some cases are matters that should be dealt with in the public domain? While I recognise that individual patients' rights must be discussed in private, does the Minister concede that there is a case for examining more closely the propensity of health authorities to go into private session to discuss financial matters which should be brought into the public domain?

Mr. Newton: I was going to conclude by saying that I would certainly not rule out the possibility of giving further consideration to this matter. However, the new clause was tabled only on Monday and therefore appeared on the amendment paper on Tuesday. Frankly, we have not had a great deal of time to consider its implications which could be quite substantial.

I was about to say that if the new clause was accepted, alongside or in addition to the duties that health authorities already possess in respect of public notice and public attendance at meetings, there would be added the following obligations. First, reasons would have to be given for closing a meeting, or part of it, to members of the public. I accept that that is not an unreasonable proposition. Secondly, copies of agendas and reports would have to be open for inspection by members of the public in advance. Thirdly, copies of minutes, agendas and reports would have to be available after the meeting for public inspection for six years. Fourthly, copies of background papers would have to be available for public inspection for four years. Finally, all the four items that I have just mentioned would also apply to sub-committees.

I would not care to rule out one of those conditions within the circumstances of our discussions tonight as a matter of principle. However, the implications, including the administrative implications and the possible costs, are considerable. They would properly need to be carefully considered as there are so many other demands on the resources available to health authorities. I cannot advise the House to accept the new clause tonight.

I want to refer to the point made by the hon. Member for Southport about community health councils. As he said, there is a private Member's Bill before the House at present concerned with applying the provisions in the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 to community health councils. Community health councils,

as the representatives of the public in an area, have substantial powers under regulations to receive information from health authorities. That is relevant when we consider how far health authorities can operate in the kind of hole-and-corner fashion to which the hon. Member for Southport referred.

Although I do not feel able, for the reasons that I have given, to advise the House to accept the new clause, I would not rule out further consideration being given to the matter. However, I would not promise that consideration being given at a particular time, for example, during later stages of the Bill.

Mr. Fearn: In view of what the Minister has said, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the clause.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1

VESTING OF PROPERTY ETC. OF CORPORATION IN A COMPANY NOMINATED BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE AND DISSOLUTION OF CORPORATION

Amendments made: No. 20, in page 1, line 20, at end insert—

'(3A) Shares issued to the Secretary of State in connection with the vesting of property, rights and liabilities in the successor company by virtue of subsection (1) above shall be issued as fully paid and treated for the purposes of the Companies Act 1985 as if they had been fully paid up by virtue of the payment to the successor company of their nominal value in cash.'.

No. 21, in line 21, at end insert—

'not later than the day on which an order is made under subsection (1) above,'

No. 22, in line 24, at end insert—

'(4A) Nothing in subsection (4) above shall be construed as limiting the operation of section 14 of the Interpretation Act 1978 (implied power to amend) so far as that section relates to the revocation of an order under subsection (4) above.

(4B) The Secretary of State may by order made by statutory instrument provide that provisions of the memorandum or articles of association of the successor company which have been specified in an order under subsection (4) above shall be alterable without his approval.'. —*[Mr. Newton.]*

Clause 2

POWERS OF SECRETARY OF STATE

Amendments made: No. 24, in page 2, line 14, leave out from 'State' to first 'the' in line 16 and insert

'may by regulations made by statutory instrument with the consent of the Treasury make provision—

(a) for guaranteeing'.

No. 25, in line 22, leave out 'to indemnify' and insert 'for indemnifying'.

No. 26, in line 26, at end insert—

'(3) A statutory instrument containing regulations under this section shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.

No. 27, in line 26, at end insert—

'(4) Any power conferred on the Secretary of State by the articles of association of the successor company shall be exercisable in the national interest notwithstanding any rule of law and the provisions of any enactment.'.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Clause 3

CORPORATION'S POWERS PENDING DISSOLUTION

Amendments made: No. 28, in page 2, line 30, leave out paragraph (a) and insert—

'(a) for valuable consideration to assign the benefit of a contract for a loan or to extinguish, or vary, by agreement an obligation under a contract for a loan;'.

No. 29, in line 46, leave out from 'may' to end of line 47 and insert

'by direction—

(a) prohibit the making by the Corporation after a date specified in the direction of offers to lend money;

(b) prohibit the making of loans by the Corporation after a date so specified; and

(c) make any prohibition contained in a direction under this subsection subject to such exceptions as may be specified in it.'.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Clause 4

EXTENSION OF POWERS OF SECRETARY OF STATE

Mrs. Currie: I beg to move amendment No. 15, page 3, line 12, at end insert—

'(dd) to provide instruction for any person;'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this we will take Government amendment No. 19.

Mrs. Currie: Amendments Nos. 15 and 19 are necessary to ensure that the National Health Service Training Authority is covered by the provisions of subsection (1) of the clause. The original drafting of clause 4 inadvertently created a situation where the NHSTA would have been able to recover only the full costs of services to non-NHS customers and not to make a profit. That is because the NHSTA's powers to charge for training come from different legislation—the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968. If we do not make the specific amendments that are before us today, the NHSTA will not be able to charge outside customers at commercial rates. The amendment merely brings the NHSTA into line with other health authorities. It does not permit the NHSTA to impose any sort of charge on health authorities.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 3, leave out lines 21 to 28.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, we will take the following amendments: No.45, in page 3, line 31, at end insert—

'( ) The directions may not apply to any action taken or commenced by the body so directed before the day following that on which the direction is given.'.

No. 46, in page 3, line 31, at end insert—

'( ) The directions may not be given to Community Health Councils nor to Local Health Councils.'.

No. 47, in page 3, line 37, after 'satisfied,' insert

'after consulting such bodies as appear to him to represent the interests of the public within the National Health Service'.

No. 49, in page 3, line 41, at end insert—

'(b) will not be to any significant extent prejudicial, directly or indirectly, to the health of any person or group of persons;'.

No. 50, in page 3, line 48, at end insert—

'(6) In exercising the powers conferred by subsection (1) above, the Secretary of State shall have regard to the value of management time likely to be used in any proposal under consideration, and to the viability of the proposal under

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

normal commercial circumstances having regard to the rate of return of the capital value of assets employed in whole or in part to the proposal'.

No. 51, in page 4, line 5, after 'determine', insert

'after consulting such bodies as appear to him to represent the interests of the public within the National Health Service'.

No. 52, in page 4, line 6, after 'determine', insert

'after consulting such bodies as appear to him to represent the interests of the public within the National Health Service'.

No. 54, in page 4, line 12, after 'satisfied', insert

'after consulting such bodies as appear to him to represent the interests of the public within the National Health Service'.

No. 55, in page 4, line 43, after 'satisfied', insert

'after consulting such bodies as appear to him to represent the interests of the public within the National Health Service'.

Mr. Hinchliffe: The amendment seeks to negate the very wide-ranging powers to be given to the Secretary of State under the various provisions of clause 4. It is a matter of some concern to Opposition Members that the Health and Medicines Bill has been generally presented as containing a series of reforming measures, designed to improve health care provision, and a number of largely unrelated provisions and proposals geared to making the National Health Service more efficient and effective. In reality, the Bill has a consistent and worrying theme—the further advancement of the market forces approach to health care.

While most attention has been given to clauses 8 and 10 of the Bill, particularly because of the threatened rebellion of Tory Members tomorrow—we will wait and see what happens then—by far the most serious implications for the future of the National Health Service are contained in clause 4. It is very sad that we should be discussing an issue as serious as this in the early hours of the morning, with so few hon. Members present.

The stated aim of clause 4 is to devolve fund-raising powers to district health authorities. The aim of the Government is clear. We discussed it in some detail in Committee. What they want to do with this particular clause is to get themselves off the hook as regards the under-funding of the National Health Service. I recall that the most recent report of the all-party Select Committee indicated that the current cumulative under-funding is in the region of £2 billion—a shocking indictment of present Government policy. So they want to get off the hook of their failure to invest in the health care of this country.

Clause 4 is a deliberate attempt to divert attention away from the Government's responsibility to fund the National Health Service because, if the clause goes through, district health authorities can be blamed for failing to tackle under-funding at local level through the powers that they will have if the Bill passes into law.

I already find that whenever I write to the Minister about Health Service issues she blames the local district health authority, no matter what subject I mention. I am primarily writing to her about under-funding and the lack of resources, and she puts the ball squarely in the court of the district health authority. I do not think that that is fair, but she will have an even greater opportunity to do that if this clause is passed.

The second aim of the Government in this clause is to gear district health authorities and area health boards to being more concerned with profit-making ventures than with provision for patient care. That worries me very much.

1 am

To be fully understood, clause 4 needs to be considered in the context of several developments. I shall specify two to which some consideration should be given. The first is the introduction into the Health Service in the last couple of years of business-style general management since the Griffiths report on management structure and, in many areas, the arrival into the Health Service of personnel who have been brought directly from private business operations.

The second issue, which ties in with that and is worrying when one considers what could happen as a result of clause 4, is the introduction of performance-related pay, which will give financial incentives on the implementation of clause 4. When I ask the Minister how many general managers in my area have received incentive payments, it worries me that I am told that that is confidential. People in many areas are worried that those incentive payments are paid to managers for closing hospitals and wards and discharging patients who should not be discharged.

I was grateful that my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) raised earlier the issue of cook-chill because, as the Minister is aware, I have pursued that matter with some vigour since last summer because of concern about it in my area. I am sorry that the Minister for Health has left the Chamber because he now professes to be an expert on the issue, but I hope that he will read my brief comments on it. One reason why I feel so strongly about the provisions of clause 4 is that in Wakefield we have had a foretaste of the kind of situation to which I believe clause 4 will lead.

The Minister will be aware that one of the first ideas that the new Griffiths-style general manager in Wakefield introduced when he was appointed a couple of years ago —a gentleman by the name of Brian Birchall who, I understand, used to work for United Biscuits Ltd.—was that of generating income and saving money through sacking catering staff and adopting a cook-chill system. Now, nearly three years later, it is interesting to see what has happened. A newly built £1 million kitchen has been standing empty, doing absolutely nothing, for over a year because of concern about the safety of that system, which has been condemned as unsafe by the district health authority's own microbiologist.

The DHA is currently having to divert money from patient care to pay for the new system. The most recent example—I hope that the Minister is listening to this because I want a response on this point later in the debate —is that Wakefield district health authority has been directed by the regional health authority to spend its additional allocation of £230,000 on making its cook-chill system safe. That money, which was begrudgingly allocated by the Government way back in November or early December, had been earmarked for the purchase of vital surgical equipment and for urgent roof repairs at Fieldhead hospital, which was designed by a gentleman who, I am sure, would be a supporter of the Government's philosophy. His name was John Poulson. That hospital roof is collapsing and needs repairing urgently. However, money is being diverted from those urgent repairs by the RHA to deal with the cook-chill problem.

The Government have turned down the authority's demand for an inquiry into that issue. I have a good idea why. Clearly, it would expose the nature of the policies that are being pursued by the Government on privatisation and the proposals contained in clause 4. Frankly, the

position in Wakefield is a shambles and a complete farce. It is precisely the position that we can anticipate when men of enterprise, who are now in general management, get their hands on the provisions in clause 4.

It is vital that the hidden agenda of clause 4 is fully understood, because it evidences the clear aims underlying the Government's policies. It is about establishing the framework for moving substantial parts of current National Health Service provision into the private sector. There is no doubt that the powers contained in the clause will allow that. That is what they are designed to do. It is about deliberately boosting private care within the National Health Service and privatising yet more essential services, with the obvious consequences for standards of service and employment conditions which we discussed earlier. It is about creating the right climate for the wholesale introduction of the private health care market. If the Government were honest, they would admit that that was their real agenda.

Amendment No. 2 seeks to delete dictatorial powers which the Government are taking on themselves to deliver what we regard as the real aims of the clause.

Mr. Fearn: Amendment No. 45 seeks to prevent the Secretary of State making retrospective directions. It would be most unfair to health authorities and their managers if retrospective directions were made. I am sure that this is not the Minister's current intention—at least, I hope it is not—but we all know what happens as events develop. Eventually conditions will arise in which a future Minister may be tempted to make a retrospective direction. I am endeavouring to take that temptation away from him or her.

Amendment No. 46 removes the right to give directions to community health councils and to local health councils. It is of the essence of these bodies that they are independent and free to represent the public in their districts.

At present the only sphere in which anyone can issue directions to CHCs is in respect of their spending only the sums allocated to them. The effect of putting CHCs under potential ministerial control as regards the priorities for activities would be to detract from that independence. I am as sure as one can reasonably be that the Government have no intention of ever issuing directions to CHCs and LHCs. I believe that the fact that the bodies were covered by clause 3 did not occur to the draftsmen. I invite the Government in all seriousness to accept the amendment.

The five amendments in this set provide for the Secretary of State to consult such bodies as appear to him to represent the interests of the public within the Health Service before he takes action. Community health councils have this responsibility for the public in their districts, and national and local politics both have local effects. Of course, the National Association of Community Health Councils and the Scottish association would be available as channels for consultation, and the Secretary of State may have other bodies in mind. Consultation would give a local input where the Secretary of State is making a detailed intervention in local services. Amendment No. 47 requires him to consult before saying that he is satisfied that there will be no adverse effects from his proposals.

The clause as drafted says that the Secretary of State may not fail in carrying out a duty laid upon him by the National Health Service Act 1977. Amendment No. 49 writes in the other side of the same coin. Under it he would be proscribed from doing anything that had adverse side effects for the health of the community. Health promotion and the prevention of ill health are important. It is essential that the search for money should not finish up damaging the health of individuals and, incidentally, increasing the workload of the NHS.

Amendment No. 50 seeks to impose on the Secretary of State the same criteria of commercial viability as the Government impose on local government direct labour organisations. It would be wrong if subsidiary activity—which fund-raising must be in NHS terms—ate up a significant amount of management time and NHS resources. The function of the NHS is to improve the health of the population. All else is subsidiary. If the Government are unwilling to abide by the same constraints as they apply to local government, we have the right to ask why.

The amendments do not set out to reverse the principle of the Government's proposals, which will inevitably go through. We seek to ensure that the proposals do not detract from mainstream health services and that they operate in a civilised manner. It is to be hoped that the Government will accept these minor amendments.

Mr. Galbraith: My remarks will be brief, because the Minister will go to the Dispatch Box replete with quotations from my good self about support for clause 4.

I support the methods by which the NHS can recoup funds that have been spent on its behalf through the intervention and behaviour of people and companies. In other words, the NHS is losing money that rightfully belongs to it. It is certainly time that the NHS was able to recoup that money. The Minister will remember that I suggested several methods by which the NHS might be able to recoup some money. Perhaps amendment No. 86, which deals with overseas patients, might have taken that point on board.

Despite liking some parts of the clause, I find it difficult to accept it, for two reasons. One is the point that was raised about health boards being instructed and not being given options. The other reason was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). Throughout the debate about the under-funding of the NHS, we have heard that, somehow, all problems will be solved by income generation. That is not the case. They are minimal amounts of money. Next year the figure will be about £10 million. and in the best possible year about £70 million. That is unacceptable, bearing in mind the inherent dangers in the clause. Therefore, it is worth making the position clear before the Minister reads out my quotations.

Mr. Corbyn: I shall not detain the House for too long, as some hon. Members probably wish to go home. We are dealing with the heart of the Bill and the most serious part of it. It is based on the false notion that the solution to the Health Service's financial problems is simply to turn each local health authority into some kind of income generation unit—that is, a local company—and start charging and recharging between various hospital departments and, indeed, within health authorities. Frankly, the whole matter is complete nonsense.

The Health Service exists to provide a health service for the people of this country. A district health authority exists to ensure the best possible provision of health care within its community. Income generation is not the business of a health authority. It is not competent to do it. It should not

[Mr. Corbyn]

be asked to do it. It has nothing to do with it. Yet health authorities are being told that they must examine the commercial potential of everything that they do. They must examine the commercial potential of each piece of land that they own and each facility that has been built on it, state whether it was given by charity in the past or built more recently, and consider ways of income generation from such nonsense as advertising on nurses' uniforms to opening shops within hospitals, and so on. It is complete and utter nonsense. I hope that the House will at least look carefully at the amendments, which will minimise the kind of nonsense that is proposed.

Essentially, the Bill is quite clever. It claims to promote a form of local decision-making, autonomy and democracy by allowing a local health authority to make charges, to commercialise, to sell, to buy, to trade, or whatever else, but, at the same time, by a convenient sleight of hand, it effectively moves what remaining powers district health authorities have straight into the Minister's hands. In effect, the Minister can direct certain forms of sale or charging merely by withholding central grant from local health authorities.

First, I hope that the House will accept that the Minister's power of direction is wholly wrong. Secondly, the effect of the proposals within the clause will not be an improvement of local health care, but will be the appointment of a whole new generation of business managers and the establishment of a business advice centre within the DHSS. It will effectively make local health authorities commercial organisations that are more interested in balancing their books than in improving health care and examining the health problems of people in their communities and cause them to move away for ever from the real purpose of the service.

Rather than this nonsense about book-keeping exercises in local health authorities, we should be discussing the way in which central Government have consistently denied local health authorities sufficient funds to deal with the problems that they face and have sought to abuse them when they have criticised the Government for giving them insufficient funds. We should be talking about shifting power in the direction of some form of democracy in the Health Service rather than destroying it, as the Minister intends to do.

1.15 am

I hope that the House will consider the proposals and that the Minister will think again and realise that charging is not the solution to the financial problems of local health authorities. The only solution to those problems is a very large injection of central Government money into local health authorities rather than handing that money out in tax relief to those in our society who already have a great deal of wealth, which is no doubt the option that the Minister prefers.

Mrs. Currie: As hon. Members will know, in very general terms, clause 4 is directed at giving health authorities more freedom to raise income for the good of the National Health Service. Indeed, the opening words of the clause are:

"in order to make more income available for improving the health service".

I should have thought, therefore, that the clause would be widely welcomed. We were a little surprised and disappointed that the reception to it has been less than enthusiastic in one or two quarters. However, I am grateful to the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) for what he has said. I shall desist from embarrassing him further, except to point out that he said in Committee that the clause had some good parts to it. From him, that is not damning with faint praise; it is an enthusiastic response, and we are grateful to him for it.

I listened with care to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). He said that clause 4 is the most important part of the Bill. The Government think that it is very important, although the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends clearly do not agree with him, as most of them appear to have gone home. The hon. Gentleman thinks that the clause is awful. We do not agree with that, and nor does NUPE. NUPE thinks that clause 4 is not bad at all. I wonder whether in his busy week the hon. Gentleman managed to come to terms with NUPE's submission to the Select Committee on Social Services, reported in *The Guardian* on 5 April this year. NUPE supports some ideas for income generation and says:

"It would add considerably to the attractiveness of hospitals if shops and banks were on the premises. There are also advantages in health authorities marketing some of the services they provide (eg laundry, catering) to other public bodies and the private sector."

That is NUPE's point of view. I am not sure how seriously I should take what NUPE says because later it says that the main cause of illness in this country is malnutrition, which is perhaps something that we should refer to the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie).

It is interesting to see how attitudes have shifted. In Committee I said that I could hear the sound of a troglodyte moving on this matter. When clause 4 first appeared, the Opposition parties jumped up and down and objected. When they read it and thought about it, however, they gradually realised that raising money for the Health Service, as provided for by the clause, is a good idea and very sensible.

The hon. Member for Wakefield talked a lot about cook-chill. I cannot quite see what the catering system that they use in Wakefield has to do with income generation. The system to which the hon. Gentleman refers is not generating income; it has cost a lot of money. What we expect to have it generate fairly soon are some decent meals for the people who have paid for it through their taxes.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I mentioned cook-chill in the context of clause 4 because that system was introduced by the new general manager as a means specifically of saving money but also of generating income—just as the Minister suggests clause 4 will generate income to local district health authorities. I used cook-chill as an illustration of what can go wrong under clause 4.

Mrs. Currie: We do not expect 100 per cent. success with all the things that we get up to in the largest business in western Europe, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has accurately described what will happen in the future in Wakefield. Surely any measure that helps us to increase the resources available for health care is welcome. We estimate that the income generation initiative will raise about £20 million a year at the beginning, rising to perhaps £70 million in three years. I say quite honestly to the House that I hope that our estimates are wrong and that health

authorities will raise much more than that. The money raised will help us to provide better patient services. This is National Health Service money and it will stay in the National Health Service to go on buying patient services and patient care.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Minister give her estimate of the cost of taking on new management staff in order to promote this income generation? Can she tell us specifically what work she has done and how much money has been spent on setting up the advice unit that the Minister said would be established in the DHSS to advise district health authorities on income generation schemes?

Mrs. Currie: The new income generation scheme is not yet costing us much money. The person we have appointed, Mr. Kerr, is working on it at the rate of one day a week. That is partly because his powers depend on the passage of the Bill. We have every expectation that not only will he earn his peanuts but that he will help us put a great deal of money into the Health Service. That also applies to all the other staff.

Mr. Galbraith *rose*——

Mrs. Currie: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would let me continue.

In Committee we dealt fairly with the notion that the clause will act in some way to the detriment of the NHS. I am sure that the House is aware that we spent eight sittings on this, which is probably more than the time that we spent on any other clause. I should like to make three general points. There is scope for health authorities to raise income in ways that are entirely sensible and reasonable. This will not lead to the NHS becoming a brash commercial organisation. We simply intend that authorities should be able to undertake relatively small-scale developments on a commercial basis for facilities that will satisfy a local need.

The typical large city centre hospital may have 250,000 visitors a year. They all stop to make a purchase before going to the hospital and will buy flowers or a card or chocolate. Why should the hospital not get that trade and make a profit? Let us go further. Why should the staff have to go outside? Many hospitals are much bigger than factories and employ more people. We will welcome banks, building societies, hairdressers, almost anything, provided it does not interfere with the running of the hospital. That is written into the clause.

As I said repeatedly in Committee, we want to look after the National Union of Public Employees. If NUPE wants to have a conference, we will be delighted to accommodate its members. They will be welcome and we shall charge them for the room and lay on a nice buffet. We shall charge for the buffet as well at highly competitive commercial rates. I shall be quite happy if the people who prepare the food are also members of NUPE.

Since the business of the Health Service is to provide a health service, I can well see money being made as our staff provide a much needed occupational health service on contract to local businesses, either on their premises or on ours. The possibilities are legion and very exciting.

The National Association of Health Authorities has just sent me a copy of its booklet "Income Generation in the National Health Service." That came out of a conference that the association organised in December, and it is quite clear that many of our ideas are already being implemented or are about to be implemented. Shropshire health authority is proposing to have advertising on closed circuit television, and that will raise an estimated annual income of £100,000.

The Greater Glasgow health board is looking at advertising and planning to maximise advertising potential on stationery, hoardings and vans. Consultation is under way on the feasibility of setting up a consortium of health boards in Scotland for advertising purposes and that will bring in an estimated income of about £25,000. If that was done in my constituency, it would go down a lot better than "Derbyshire supports nuclear free zones", which is the advertising that we get on all our public sector stationery at the moment.

The catering services in Brighton health authority provide meals to outside organisations, including resettlement centres and Age Concern. It has been in operation for some time and brings in an estimated income of £20,000. South Bedfordshire health authority runs its printing department on a commercial basis and has an estimated annual income of £20,000. Portsmouth and South-East Hampshire health authority has a very good central sterile supplies department and provides a service to other health authorities and to private industry. According to the National Association of Health Authorities, the estimated annual income is £600,000. I do not know whether that is a misprint, but it gives an idea of the sort of income that might be possible. The possibilities are exciting and we look to Ron Kerr and his staff to help carry the proposals forward.

I turn to the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn). On amendment No. 46, to the extent that community health services and other such bodies can make use of the powers, we see no reason why they should not be subject to the same powers of direction as the health authorities. We understand that amendments Nos. 47, 51, 52, 54 and 55 seek to require the Secretary of State or, where powers are delegated, the health authority to consult bodies representing the public before embarking on any income generation scheme, before setting amenity bed charges, before authorising pay beds and before setting pay bed charges. I welcome this opportunity to repeat the assurances I gave in Committee that there are adequate safeguards contained in clause 4 to ensure that nothing may be done that might affect adversely the duties of the Secretary of State under the National Health Service Act 1977. We already consult widely on all sorts of major issues and the views of the community health councils are taken along with, for example, the views of private sector health care providers and NHS staff on the issue of pay beds.

In the case of relatively minor income generation activities such as the creation of a florist's shop or newsagent, it hardly seems necessary to write into law that the health authority must consult the local community health council.

Our concerns apply in much the same way to some of the other points. For example, amendment No. 49 talks about activities that may be injurious to health. We do not intend that authorities should introduce any schemes that run counter to general health policies. That will be set out clearly in the guidance that we will be issuing to the health authorities. In that guidance we will be suggesting, with reference to amendment No. 50, that health authorities should consider approaches involving the leasing and franchising of different activities. I understand the concern

[Mrs. Currie]

expressed by the hon. Member for Wakefield, but I assure him that the amendments are unnecessary and should be rejected.

Ms. Harman: I will ask leave to withdraw the amendment, but I have to say that we will be watching the way in which the Government use——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is a technical point. The hon. Lady may speak to the amendment, but it must be withdrawn, if it is to be withdrawn, by the hon. Member who moved it.

Ms. Harman: We are concerned to see how the Government will be using the new clause. It is clear that it will not free district health authorities to do whatever they want. The clause gives power to the Secretary of State to force district health authorities to do things that they do not necessarily want to do.

It is clear that from the central Exchequer there is a deliberate policy of under-funding district health authorities. That has been recognised by all independent reputable bodies, and it is disgraceful at a time when there is plenty of money available in the Exchequer that could be used to finance the Health Service. We are in no doubt, and neither are Health Service managers, that if any money is raised locally by district health authorities, it will simply be clawed back by a further reduction in allocation from the Treasury. That point was recognised by the right hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Sir B. Hayhoe). It is also generally recognised that forcing managers at local level to generate income rather than health care and improved quality of services would be a diversion from the task that we should be setting them, which is to improve the quality of care.

I hope that the Minister will not seek to continue to misrepresent our view or that of NUPE. We are certainly not against the idea of shops and so on being used as an amenity for those people who work in, are treated by or who come to visit people in the Health Service. We are against the idea of the Health Service as a whole having to be financed from peanuts raised at local level when there is plenty of money in the Exchequer to enable it to be run properly.

Basically, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) stated, this is more of a thrust towards commercialisation of the Health Service. We do not want to see that, nor do the Health Service professionals, others who work in the Health Service, the British people, or the managers. We shall be watching with concern, if the Government refuse to amend the Bill in the way that we want, to see how they operate this clause.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Had we been discussing this matter earlier in the day, I would have pursued it to a Division. For the reasons given by my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand that Government amendments Nos. 16, 17 and 18 are not to be moved.

1.30 am

Mr. Fearn: I beg to move amendment No. 53, in page 4, line 34, leave out from 'section' to 'hospitals' in line 38 and insert—

'unless he is satisfied that sufficient accommodation and facilities are available for services provided by the National Health Service'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 56, in page 5, line 12, leave out from 'section' to 'hospitals' in line 16 and insert—

'unless he is satisfied that sufficient accommodation and facilities are available for services provided by the National Health Service'.

Mr. Fearn: These amendments reverse the intention of the Bill. The Bill says that the Secretary of State shall revoke provision for private practice only if he is sure that there is adequate provision elsewhere. We say that he should revoke that authority unless he is sure that there is enough National Health Service provision.

The duty of the Secretary of State is to manage the National Health Service and to provide a comprehensive public service. Private services are a matter for the market; they have nothing to do with the Secretary of State.

What does the Secretary of State propose if there is insufficient provision for the National Health Service and the private sector? Under the clause he is to protect the private sector and let the National Health Service go hang. That is entirely wrong because anybody in the population can use the National Health Service, but only people who can afford to do so can use private services.

There can be no justification for the Government's view. It is a direct attack on National Health Service provision in places where there are poor services. It is happening at a time when the National Health Service is increasingly falling short of meeting public need. This is an issue of principle. If the Secretary of State acts in accordance with the terms of the clause, he will be failing the National Health Service.

Mrs. Currie: The purpose of subsection (2) that is the subject of amendment No. 53 is simply to restate the powers that have been in place since the Health Service Act 1980. The Government have no intention to change the Secretary of State's powers to authorise or to revoke provision of pay beds. Amendment No. 56 covers the same ground for Scotland. I urge hon. Members to reject the amendments.

Amendment negatived.

Mrs. Currie: I beg to move amendment No. 86, in page 5, line 18, at end insert—

'(9) In section 121 of the National Health Service Act 1977 (charges in respect of non-residents) after the word "charges", in the first place where it occurs, there shall be inserted the words "as the Secretary of State may determine".

(10) In section 98 of the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978 (which makes corresponding provision for Scotland) for the words "may be prescribed", in the second place where they occur, there shall be substituted the words "the Secretary of State may determine".

(11) The following paragraph shall be added at the end of the sections mentioned in subsections (9) and (10) above— "The Secretary of State may calculate charges under this section on any basis that he considers to be the appropriate commercial basis."'.

The amendment could be christened the "Galbraith amendment." I shall explain later exactly what I mean by that. I must apologise to the House for tabling the amendment so late this week. It deals with the setting of

charges in respect of National Health Service treatment of overseas visitors. At present, health authorities charge overseas visitors who are liable to pay for National Health Service treatment on the basis of the schedule of charges produced centrally. Those charges are largely derived from private patient charges. Since April 1987, health authorities have been able to set their private patient charges and clause 4 allows them to make commercial charges. We believe that it is sensible to bring the setting of charges to overseas visitors into line with private patients, and the amendment has that purpose.

We believe that there are good reasons for making that change. First, it will enable us to recover realistic charges from overseas visitors who are not coverd by inter-Government reciprocal arrangements or by other exemptions. From Royal Assent, the effect will be that overseas patients will be on the same footing as private patients. Secondly, it will be simpler because instead of having two sets of rules concerning overseas and private patients there will now be one, which will still be directed from the centre, although there will be a single set of rules and health authorities will set their rates according to the local market and their judgment thereon.

The hon. Member for Bearsden and Strathkelvin (Mr. Galbraith) convinced us of the value of tabling the amendment. He waxed eloquent about the subject on Second Reading and talked about it at length in Committee. I understand that there are restrictions on quoting an hon. Member, although I can quote a Minister's remarks, during the passage of a Bill. However, I refer hon. Members to a very long discussion that we had during the passage of the Bill. To recognise the conventions of the House, I shall not quote the hon. Gentleman exactly, but, broadly speaking, he said that often overseas patients are charged at a loss to the hospital.

People with considerable financial resources come to this country for highly specialised treatments that are available only in certain hospitals in certain countries. The hon. Member felt that there was no reason why hospitals should not charge non-residential patients at commercial rates. He said that it was not a major issue and he did not want to make a great deal of it, but he wondered whether the Minister would comment. The Minister is commenting. We checked the law, and the law as it stands would not allow us to do what he wanted, and that is why we tabled the amendment.

Many overseas visitors are exempt from NHS charges for various reasons—if they are European Community citizens, if they are covered by the reciprocal arrangements that we have with a number of countries, or if they are studying here. However, we agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is reasonable to expect the rest to be covered by travel and medical insurance, just as the British traveller abroad needs to be covered. It is entirely viable that, for those who have to pay, charges should be made on the same basis as those for private patients. Therefore, I urge hon. Members on both sides of the House to accept the amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Amendment No. 57.

Mr. Fearn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understood that we would adjourn on clause 4. Amendment No. 57 is part of clause 5.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No such motion has been moved. Does the hon. Member wish to move his amendment?

Mr. Fearn: Yes.

Clause 5

RETIREMENT OF PRACTITIONERS

Amendment No. 57 proposed, in page 5, line 40, after 'determine', insert

'(being no greater than the value of such loss)'.—*[Mr. Fearn.]*

Question, That the amendment be made, *put and negatived.*

Further consideration of the Bill adjourned—*[Mr. Ryder.]*

Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee), to be further considered this day.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE BILL (ALLOCATION OF TIME)

Ordered,

That the Order of 22nd February be varied by substituting for paragraph 2(1) the following:

'Report and Third Reading

2.—(1) The proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading of the Bill shall be completed in five allotted days and shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten p.m. on the last of those days; and for the purposes of Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) this Order shall be taken to allot to the proceedings on Consideration such part of those days as the Resolution of the Business Committee may determine.'—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Elderly Persons (Maintenance Grants)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ryder.]*

1.38 am

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): I am very grateful to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for coming to the House at this late hour to answer the debate. I hope that the people of Wales will take note of how assiduously he carries out his duties even in the very small hours of the morning.

I should make it quite plain that I am concerned only with one specific point and not with the much wider question of the impact on pensioners and others of the changes in the social security system resulting not just from the Social Security Act 1986 but from many other factors, such as the increases in water charges and electricity tariffs, the requirement that all except the very poorest should pay 20 per cent. of their rates and the loss in many cases of rate rebates and lower interest rates for their savings, which is a very heavy factor for other people, but not so much for pensioners. Those factors, which affect the standard of living of many of the poorer pensioners, though not the very poorest, led me to abstain in the vote yesterday afternoon.

My abstention was intended as a criticism not of the DHSS or of my hon. Friend and his handling of these matters at the Welsh Office, but of the way in which they have been forced by the Treasury to make choices which they should not be forced to make in the country's present affluent circumstances. What is more relevant to the particular point that I am making tonight is that they are being driven into an approach which penalises even modest thrift, as part of the process of targeting benefit to the most needy.

I know that that problem crops up over all areas of social security. It is inseparable from any attempt to target help on those who need it most, though I think Ministers, and especially the Prime Minister, would do well to face it a bit more frankly and to admit that targeting benefits inevitably means damaging the people and discouraging the instincts that ought to matter most to a Conservative Government. I have to admit that the problem is one that has baffled Governments throughout the ages when they have set out to relieve poverty or distress.

The specific point that concerns me is the support for elderly people who are discharged from NHS hospitals into private nursing homes. As long as they are in hospital they are accommodated and treated free of charge, apart from an abatement of their pension after eight weeks, which no one will complain about. That is regardless of their means or the means of their spouse. But if that elderly person is discharged from a National Health Service hospital into a nursing home other than one run by the local authority, very different considerations apply. The fairly hefty fees must be paid, and in practice—certainly in my own county of Clwyd and, I suspect, in most other health authority areas—they are paid by the elderly person himself or herself, or by the spouse, if either have savings above the £3,000 level that disqualifies them from income support.

Let me put the case of one of my constituents who prefers not to be named. I shall call her Mrs. X. She is in her seventies and suffers from Parkinson's disease. Her husband is suffering from senile dementia and is being very well looked after in a private nursing home. Her savings exceed the £3,000 limit, so the only help she gets is the attendance allowance, plus her husband's state retirement pension. All this goes towards meeting the nursing home fees. To pay the balance of £110 per week she has to draw on her savings. Last year she spent over £5,500 in this way. At this rate she will soon have no savings left, and only then will she be able to get the fees paid.

One solution is for elderly people to remain in NHS hospitals until they die and for their spouses to refuse point blank to pay any fees for them in nursing homes if they are moved out of hospital. That is what another of my constituents has been driven to do. He is 78 and has looked after his sick wife as best he could for many years, but he is now too infirm himself to go on doing so. His wife was admitted to hospital with fluid on the lung, and while there she first had a heart attack and then broke her femur. Now she is fit enough to be moved from hospital to a nursing home, but the husband wants to know who is to pay the fees. If he uses his remaining savings to do so, she may live a few years but he will be reduced to dependency on the state for the rest of his life.

I might mention another way in which the regulations are hurting people who move out of hospital into nursing homes. The hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) has been much concerned by this, and I am indebted to him for this example. I have other similar though less clear-cut cases in my own constituency. It concerns an 88-year-old lady who owns her own home and has been in a nursing home since 1985. On 1 April she was informed that she was no longer eligible for income support, presumably because the house she owns, though it yields no income, is a capital asset, valued above £3,000. She is trying to sell the house but she cannot do so. In the meantime, there is no money to pay the nursing home fees of £180 per week. The obvious answer in this case should be a bank loan, but it seems that bank managers are not sympathetic towards cases such as this, and under the new regulations the DHSS seems to have no discretion to help. So what is the poor woman to do?

It may be that my hon. Friend the Minister will quote to me from Health Circular 81(1) and tell me that where a consultant or a general practitioner recommends the transfer of a patient from an NHS hospital to a nursing home the health authority has the power to enter into contractual arrangements with the nursing home to care for that patient, at no cost to the patient or his or her spouse. But the health authority does not have to exercise that power, and certainly at Clwyd it has chosen not to do so. With the other pressures on it, and given the age profile of its area, I can see very clearly why it has so decided.

The solution suggested to me by my constituent Mr. Alun Roberts, to whom I am indebted for much of my information, is that funds should be allocated to health authorities for specific purposes such as this. I am not so sure about that. I can easily envisage other problems which would require specific funds to be dedicated to them, and there could be no end to such piecemeal financing.

None the less, the Government should surely be seeking some way not just of mitigating the very damaging effects that their targeting polices are having on people's instincts for thrift, but—more specific to my purpose tonight—of making it easier instead of harder for elderly people to move out of hospitals and into nursing homes. Even if we consider the matter purely in terms of value for money, it must make sense to encourage people to move out of

hospital, where they are very costly to look after, to nursing homes, where they can be looked after at substantially lower cost.

It seems absurd to do anything to discourage that. By withholding financial support from public funds and making what may in the end prove to be a vain attempt to force spouses to spend their small savings to pay the fees, we may well end up by placing a greater burden on public funds. Moreover, we shall have added substantially to the heavy burdens already being borne by the relatives of elderly sick patients.

1.45 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ian Grist): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) on his success in obtaining this Adjournment debate. His compassion and concern for the more vulnerable members of society—and particularly for his constituents—is always apparent. I am particularly grateful to him for raising this important subject, because it is one that concerns us all and one to which the Government have given considerable and detailed attention.

My hon. Friend has given the House examples of the needs of individuals which raise important general principles. If my response seems concerned primarily with principles and with general rules, that is in no sense because that is how the Government perceive the issues. However, soundly based principles are the essential bedrock of a system of support that best meets the needs of individuals as individuals.

Let me start with one of the most important of those principles—one to which my hon. Friend has rightly referred. It is that there is no question of our departing from the fundamental principle that access to medical care should not depend on the ability of an individual to pay. Let me be specific about this. Our position is clear and on the record in all our public statements, and in our advice to the health authorities: no patient who comes to the NHS should be placed in a private nursing home against his or her wishes if that person, or a relative, would be responsible for the home's charges.

I know that my hon. Friend chooses his words carefully, and I did not hear in what he said any suggestion imputing any undue influence, direct or indirect, on the individuals, the details of whose circumstances he draws to the House's attention, or any suggestion that they or their relatives had been persuaded against their better judgment to agree to placement in a private home. If, however, my hon. Friend has any such evidence I should very much like to have it so that I can take the matter up with the relevant authority and receive a full explanation.

That would be a serious matter. I stress this not least because not only are the consent of the individual and the views of affected relatives to be respected, but decisions about the discharge of people from hospital are for the medical consultant in charge of the patient's care to make —and they must be made on clinical grounds. Financial considerations, therefore, should not enter into the consultant's decision. Thus, when a consultant decides that a patient requires continuing medical or nursing care as an in-patient, it falls squarely and unequivocally on the NHS to supply it, at no cost to the patient or his or her relatives.

The care needed may be provided either directly by the NHS in an NHS bed, or by transfer to a private nursing home under contractual arrangements under which the NHS—not the patient—meets the full costs and retains the ultimate responsibility for the patient's care.

I should like to stress that the status of patients in such contractual facilities is thoroughly safeguarded and protected. Let me quote from the circular referred to by my hon. Friend:

> "A patient admitted to or using a contractual facility remains an NHS patient and may only be charged for services as permitted by the NHS Acts. The arrangements for the use of independent facilities should provide for treatment and maintenance with the usual amenities without charge to the patient in exactly the same way as a patient in an NHS establishment. Authorities should be careful to ensure that patients are not pressed into paying for extra amenities (outside the terms of the contract) which they do not want. There should be no disparity between the clinical care and services provided to NHS patients and the hospital or home's private patients."

When someone in hospital no longer needs the level of medical or nursing care provided, it is open to the hospital to arrange a more suitable placement. When patients are moved from an NHS hospital to a nursing home, the health authority should make it clear whether or not it will pay for the patient's care before he is transferred; and, as I have already said, no patient can be transferred without his consent if he or a relative has to be responsible for the home's charges.

I hope that I have established clearly the approach that the Government have taken, and continue to take, on the protection of the rights of the individual. Clearly, the fulfilment of the objective of meeting the needs of individuals for medical and nursing care is a major and continuing challenge for our health authorities. They must meet it by making maximum use of their own community health staffs and by working in collaboration with social service authorities and others with a part to play in enabling people to live in their own homes whenever possible, where that matches their wishes.

That increasing throughput, and the keeping of hospital episodes to a minimum, must be seen as part of our overall strategy for the elderly in Wales. That has been aimed—through effective collaboration with all the agencies involved—at trying to maximise people's potential to remain living independently and to keep to a minimum any spells of inpatient care that may be needed.

Last year we launched our elderly initiative, under which we are making available some £7 million to fund pilot, innovative and, it is to be hoped, replicable projects in the provision of care for elderly people.

I turn now to the second important set of issues that my hon. Friend raised when he appeared to suggest, by referring to particular cases among his constituents, that it is in principle unfair that a person who decides he wishes to be cared for in a private nursing home on a permanent basis should be required to contribute towards the costs of that care. I should be surprised if that is what my hon. Friend intended to imply, and it may be that I have not fully understood him.

The Government's view is clear. Where people genuinely cannot afford the care they need, but where they elect to have that care in a private nursing home, income support will be payable to them up to the relevant limit. Incidentally, we have recently increased the limits significantly. For instance, in nursing homes for the elderly, the limit has been raised a further £10 to £185. That means the limit for those homes will have increased by £50 in three years.

[Mr. Ian Grist]

Government spending on support for people in private and voluntary homes has risen from £10 million in 1979 to some £0·5 billion now, but the Government believe it is right that the individual should look to his or her resources before drawing on public funds. I hope that my hon. Friend can see the sense in that. Any other arrangement would not only be grossly unfair to the taxpayer, but would make it impossible to concentrate assistance on those who need it most. It must be remembered that we are talking about people who should themselves have decided that they wished to be cared for in a private nursing home.

Once the principle is accepted that it is right to have regard to an individual's own resources before deciding what public resources might be paid, difficult, sensitive and complex questions arise as to the circumstances in which individuals should receive support—and to what extent. So we have developed a number of important safeguards that are relevant to the issues and examples my hon. Friend has raised.

First, where one of a couple is permanently resident in a nursing or residential home, their entitlement to income support is assessed—as was their entitlement to supplementary benefit—separately. So if the spouse in residential care has no savings, but the partner who is not in residential care has, that will not affect the entitlement to benefit of the spouse in residential care.

Moreover, where there are joint assets, for the purpose of assessing entitlement to benefit they must be divided equally between the two individuals. Perhaps most important of all, where the partner of someone who has entered residential care permanently, or another elderly or incapacitated relative is still living in the family home, the value of the house is disregarded in the assessment of entitlement to benefit of the person in residential care.

I should say also that the cases referred to by my hon. Friend arose before this week's social security changes came into effect, and no doubt he will welcome the fact that the capital exemption limit has been doubled to £6,000. That means that a substantial number of people have become eligible for benefit who were not previously eligible.

In those ways, and with those safeguards, the Government have sought to strike the right balance between helping those in real need who genuinely cannot be expected to help themselves, or help themselves fully, and our duty as stewards of public resources paid for by the taxpayer.

Let me repeat my invitation to my hon. Friend to pass on any details of cases that he has mentioned, including the case of the lady who has a problem in selling her house, where individuals do not appear to have been treated in accordance with the arrangements that we have laid down. However, I must ask him to draw those matters to the attention of my right hon. Friends at the Department of Health and Social Security. More directly, he might like to suggest to his constituents, or to the local DHSS officials, where appropriate, that a fresh assessment of the entitlement of individuals should be carried out.

I began by saying that the issues which we have been able to debate at this late hour are fundamental and important. They concern, as I have said, some of our most vulnerable citizens. As I am sure my hon. Friend is aware, the number of very elderly people in Wales—those aged over 75 in particular—is set to continue to rise dramatically in the years ahead, from an estimated 189,000 in 1986 to more than 220,000 by the year 2001—a mere 13 years away. Their needs for care will be one of the principal issues facing us as a society.

That is just one of the reasons why we are reviewing with the greatest care the future arrangements for the public financing of community care in the light of Sir Roy Griffiths' recent report. To pick up what my hon. Friend has referred to, Sir Roy has not said what level of financial support should be provided by the Government towards community care. What he has done is to produce proposals aimed at securing the better organisation and delivery of care for individuals, whatever the level of public funding.

We are considering that report and we will come forward with our own proposals as soon as possible. I shall certainly bear in mind all that my hon. Friend has said as we do this and as we review how we should meet this great human challenge.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 14 April 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT BILL *(By Order)*
Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [10 December], That the Bill be now considered.
Debate further adjourned till Thursday 21 April.

TEIGNMOUTH QUAY COMPANY BILL *(By Order)*

YORK CITY COUNCIL BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

ASSOCIATED BRITISH PORTS (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

CARDIFF BAY BARRAGE BILL *(By Order)*

CITY OF LONDON (SPITALFIELDS MARKET) BILL *(By Order)*

FALMOUTH CONTAINER TERMINAL BILL *(By Order)*

NORTH KILLINGHOLME CARGO TERMINAL BILL *(By Order)*

ST. GEORGE'S HILL, WEYBRIDGE, ESTATE BILL *(By Order)*

SOUTHERN WATER AUTHORITY BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 21 April.

BRITISH RAILWAYS (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*
Order read for resuming debate on Question [15 March], That the Bill be now read a Second time.
Debate to be resumed upon Thursday 21 April.

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE TOWN MOOR BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for Second reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 21 April.

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL FINANCE

Personal Incomes

1. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the effect on the weekly income of a single unemployed person with no private income of his Budget changes.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Major): My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has asked me to apologise to the House for his absence today. He is attending meetings of the interim and development committees of the IMF and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development in Washington.

The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is that the Budget is about tax and will not therefore have a direct effect on the incomes of those who do not pay tax.

Mr. Wareing: Can the Chief Secretary justify an unemployed young person under the age of 25 having his social security benefit reduced to £26·05 a week when one of the right hon. Gentleman's millionaire friends earning —or should I say, receiving—an income of £1 million a year has been given £3,729 a week as a result of the Chancellor's Budget? Is that not a disgrace, and does the right hon. Gentleman not go in fear that his rich friends might now become part of the dependancy culture of which his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services is so fearful?

Mr. Major: A substantial part of that question does not arise from the original question. However, more than half a million people under 25 gain in cash terms, as the hon. Gentleman should know.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the unemployed, and the Budget does several things of material interest to them. First and foremost, it will, in my judgment, improve their chances of getting a job. Secondly, when they have jobs the Budget will raise the threshold at which they will pay tax. Thirdly, it reduces the basic rate at which they pay. Fourthly, the unemployed will receive any tax rebates speedily, and they will be substantial rebates if they have been unemployed for some time.

Mr. Higgins: Despite the precise wording of my right hon. Friend's original answer, does he agree that as a result of the Budget some of those who were paying tax will not now pay it?

Mr. Major: I am entirely content to agree with my right hon. Friend about that. The figure that my right hon. Friend perhaps had in the back of his mind was 780,000 —the number of people who will not pay tax and who otherwise would have done so.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We will refuse to separate the tax cuts of the Budget from the benefit cuts of the social security changes. Does the Minister agree with my estimate that, after this Budget, a person earning £100,000 a year will receive a staggering extra £268 a week, while the benefit changes mean that a single unemployed person will receive less than one tenth of that amount? Can the right hon. Gentleman—he is spoken of as a future leader of the Conservative party—not see what anyone with a basic

sense of fairness can see, namely, that it is the function of government to eradicate social injustice, not deliberately seek to create it?

Mr. Major: The Government spend one third of their income on social security to eradicate social injustice.

Economic Growth

2. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for how many years the rate of economic growth in the United Kingdom has averaged 3 per cent., or more.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Peter Lilley): The six years to 1987 saw average economic growth of 3 per cent. a year. This is the longest period of steady growth, at around this rate, for half a century.

Mr. Mitchell: Are not those figures an eloquent testimony to the success of the Government's economic policies? Is it not interesting to note that in the last year, when we have had growth of 4·5 per cent., we have been firmly at the top of the international league of growth of our major competitor countries?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is a great contrast with the 1960s and 1970s, when we were bottom of the international growth league. It is a contrast also with the performance of the last Labour Government, when the growth rate in every year was lower than the average of the last six years under this Government.

Mr. Beith: What will happen to growth if exchange rates are at a high and uncompetitive level? Will the Minister heed the warnings of the CBI and others about the effects on GDP of what is happening to exchange rates, or would that be bucking the market?

Mr. Lilley: I am happy to say that the outlook for growth is very favourable and we remain one of the more rapidly growing countries in the Western world.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my hon. Friend agree that industrial growth is proceeding well and that it was fed very much with the pound much lower than it is today? My right hon. Friend the Chancellor, who is in Washington, says that we will have a stable pound. Without a stable and lower pound we will not maintain economic growth.

Mr. Lilley: Economic growth has been improved and our economy transformed by a series of measures to improve the supply side performance of the British economy. That is of the utmost importance and has been achieved within a monetary framework which keeps monetary policy bearing down on inflation and ensures that exchange rates are reasonably stable.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Given that the Minister thinks that the Government's economic record is so wonderful, can he tell us how many people are in full-time employment in the United Kingdom now compared with the figure for the last year of the Labour Government?

Mr. Lilley: I remind the hon. Gentleman that over the past year the fall in unemployment has been greater than ever previously recorded.

Business Taxation

3. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what responses he has received to his Budget proposals for changes in business taxation.

10. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what responses he has received to his Budget proposals for changes in business taxation.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Norman Lamont): The proposals that my right hon. Friend announced in his Budget statement have been widely welcomed.

Mr. Brown: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the responses which may well have come in congratulate the Government on establishing a single rate of inheritance tax? Will not this measure ensure that it will be much easier to pass on family businesses and retain those family businesses in operation for future generations?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is right, but that was, of course, just one of the measures in the Budget. It will, as he said, enable family businesses to be passed on to future generations, which is a good thing. The Budget was widely welcomed. The CBI said:

"This is the Budget we have been waiting for. It will help to maintain the momentum of Britain's economic recovery and should boost business confidence."

Mr. Devlin: Is it not right that, because of the Budget, we now have one of the lowest rates of business taxation in the Western world? Is that not a major boost to companies wishing to invest here, to companies that are already here, and to the revenue?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is right. We have one of the lowest rates of corporation tax in the Western world, and the small business rate of tax is at the lowest level ever. This should be a great magnet, bringing further inward investment into this country, and should be welcomed by everyone.

Mr. Darling: Has the Chancellor received representations on the business expansion scheme proposals, to the effect that it is wrong to provide a tax shelter for those who are the richest in society to enable them to set up rented accommodation, often to exploit those at the poorest end of society?

Mr. Lamont: We have not received representations to that effect. The hon. Gentleman may be interested, and perhaps surprised, to hear that we have had some representations from people protesting because we have narrowed and limited the relief fund of the business expansion scheme. We did that because we wanted to concentrate on start-ups and small businesses. We think that it is well worth while extending the scheme to the private rented sector. We need more rented accommodation.

Mr. Chris Smith: Do the Government not recognise that their own commissioned survey of the business expansion scheme has shown that it has relatively minor job creation effects, that it has tended to concentrate on low-risk, asset-based enterprises and not on high risk ventures, that it is largely based in the south-east, and that it has tended to transfer funds from the north to the south? In addition, it is being used as a tax haven rather than as an efficient way of channelling private investment into enterprise and wealth creation. Far from expanding it, should the Government not have changed it radically or even scrapped it?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman seems to be ignoring what I have just said. In many respects, we have narrowed the scheme. It is obvious from his question that he is unaware that we had a survey of the scheme done by Peat,

Marwick, Mitchell and Co. which reached very different conclusions from those to which the hon. Gentleman referred. It s precisely because we think that the scheme should not be used to create asset-backed investments at the taxpayer's expense that we have narrowed its application to £½ million small businesses. That will deal precisely with the point that the hon. Getleman raised and he should acknowledge that.

Budget (Representations)

5. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on his Budget.

The Paymaster General (Mr. Peter Brooke): My right hon. Friend has received widespread support for his Budget.

Mr. Colvin: Nevertheless, it is a pity that a Treasury Minister did not have time to meet representatives of the general aviation industry before the Chancellor's Budget, which might then have pleased that industry a little more. Does my hon. Friend think it fair that jet airliners pay no duty on the Avtur fuel that they use, while the general aviation industry, which is 95 per cent. piston engine, pays duty on its Avgas? Does my hon. Friend not think that that is unfair?

Mr. Brooke: I am sorry that I did not have the chance of meeting my hon. Friend on this occasion as I have done in previous years. On his specific question, the duty on Avgas was reduced to half the duty on petrol in 1982, and there is no justification for a further reduction. Avgas is a high-lead petrol and many cars could run on it. The pump price of Avgas limits abuse. If the duty were removed there would be a serious risk of the diversion of Avgas to road fuel use and significant revenue loss.

Mr. Duffy: Given that economic stability at home and constructive economic co-operation abroad are among the Budget's prime objectives, how does the Minister reconcile yesterday's G7 commitment to stable exchange rates with recent serious policy disagreements within the Treasury and at No. 10 about both interest rate and exchange rate policy?

Mr. Brooke: Given the first half of the hon. Gentleman's question, he must have been very pleased by yesterday's announcement.

Mr. Roger King: Is my hon. Friend aware that this is a Budget, not for the rich people of this country, but for the 25 million people engaged in employment and producing the real wealth of this nation? Is it not the result of those people keeping more of their own money that indirectly leads to our creating more real wealth for use in our health services and social benefits programmes?

Mr. Brooke: My hon. Friend is quite right to draw attention to the fact that the Budget does not involve a giveaway. It involves less money being taken from taxpayers. My hon. Friend is also entirely right to say that it is the success of the whole economy that has contributed to our present prosperity.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Is the Minister aware of the widespread resentment at the Chancellor's rates bill for his mansion at Dorneywood in Buckinghamshire? That bill will fall from £6,400 to a mere £400 for the Chancellor and his wife when the poll tax is introduced. That sort of unfair taxation has caused widespread resentment.

Mr. Brooke: Some of the difficulties that the Opposition are experiencing at the moment may arise from the fact that that question has absolutely nothing to do with the original one.

Mr. Gow: So that the Labour party may make a proper international comparison, can my hon. Friend confirm that the top rate of income tax in the Soviet Union is 41 per cent.?

Mr. Brooke: My hon. Friend has always been a man of the widest possible information, and I am delighted that he has added to mine.

Mr. John Smith: Bearing in mind that the Minister has other political responsibilities as well as his duties at the Treasury, can he estimate how much the Conservative party will gain and how much the Revenue will lose as a result of the proposal in the Budget to remove inheritance tax completely from all donations to political parties?

Mr. Brooke: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is quite right to draw attention to the fact that I have separate responsibilities. The office of Paymaster General is quite separate from the Treasury. In neither capacity, however, do I propose to crystal gaze on the question that the right hon. and learned Gentleman asked.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will my hon. Friend reconsider the matter of Avgas in view of the experience with other fuels, namely that by changing the colour of the fuel one can ensure that it is not used improperly? Does my hon. Friend agree that that method is better than using taxation for the same purpose?

Mr. Brooke: I will treat my hon. Friend's question as a very early representation for next year's Budget.

Personal Incomes

6. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the weekly gain for a single person earning £50,000 a year from his Budget tax changes.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Just under £80 for an individual with no reliefs other than the single person's allowance.

Mr. Galbraith: Does the Minister agree that it would have been better to give that money to the pensioners, who have received nothing from the Budget? What has the Minister to say to the pensioner from my constituency, who has travelled here today, whose total income from a state pension and a British Rail pension is £60 per week and who received nothing from the Budget, but last Monday lost £8 as a result of housing benefit cuts? When will the Government stop taking from the poor and giving to the rich?

Mr. Lamont: As the hon. Gentleman knows, it is not the custom to announce pension increases at the time of the Budget. That will be done at the time of the Autumn Statement. A single person with an income of £60 per week will be paying tax and will benefit from the Budget. The contribution made by the cuts in tax rates is that they will continue the economic growth that has enabled us to increase the total pensions and social security bills by very considerable amounts.

Mr. David Shaw: How does my hon. Friend account for the fact that when higher rates of taxation reached a maximum of 83 per cent. under the Labour Government they raised only £800 million, whereas today, when the

highest rate is 60 per cent., £3,800 million is raised? Does this not show the logic of reducing, and continuing to reduce, higher rates of taxation?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. He and the Opposition may be interested to know that in 1978-79 the taxpayers on higher rates produced 19 per cent. of tax revenue, whereas the figure for this year is 30 per cent. We have thus demonstrated that it is possible to cut rates and increase revenue, as my hon. Friend has pointed out on this and other occasions.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the Minister confirm that as a result of the Finance Bill published today £800 million will be given in tax handouts to the very small minority of people with earnings in excess of £100,000 per year? Will he also confirm that for the same amount of money no pensioner need suffer a cut in housing benefit, no family need suffer a freeze in child benefit and no one at all need feel compelled to beg or borrow from the state charity that has been set up in the form of the social fund? Does he accept that in all sections of the community there is deep revulsion against the two-nation Toryism which he now represents and which has produced the most unjust, the most unfair and the most socially divisive Finance Bill this century?

Mr. Lamont: I do not see anything "two-nation" about 70 per cent.—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members should listen to what I have to say. Seventy per cent. of the cost of the Budget is going on basic rate cuts and increases in personal allowances. I also see nothing "two-nation" about 23 million people benefiting from the basic rate cut.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the reductions in the higher rates of tax will encourage the internationally mobile either to stay in the United Kingdom or to come back to it? Does he agree also that the presence of leading surgeons and leading industrialists, and leaders in other areas, can only benefit Britain?

Mr. Lamont: That is no doubt why cutting the higher rates in the past has increased revenue. My hon. Friend rightly emphasises that we need to attract inward investment, and we also need to attract the managers that go with those projects. That is just one of the reasons why the higher rate cuts are to the benefit of the whole economy.

Departmental Votes (Transfers)

7. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements his Department has to vire money between one Department and another.

Mr. Major: The Treasury has no power to vire money between Votes. That can be done only by the presentation of Supplementary Estimates.

Mr. Allen: Will the Minister concede that the Treasury's monthly returns show an increase in spending in the last three or four months of the financial year which is due to Departments trying to spend up to their limits, and that if there were an effective viring system, transferring money from one Department to another, greater spending could take place on housing and social security?

Mr. Major: There has for a long time been bunching in public expenditure, and not only at the end of the year. It is precisely to deal with unexpected demands that we have a contingency reserve that is unallocated at the beginning of the year. This year, that was substantially used.

Mr. Hanley: Will my right hon. Friend move more towards three-year funding arrangements for more Government Departments?

Mr. Major: We agree a public expenditure settlement that spreads far further than one year.

Balance of Payments

8. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the impact on the current account of the balance of payments of the basic and higher rate income tax cuts announced in the Budget.

9. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the impact on the current account of the balance of payments of the basic and higher rate income tax cuts announced in the Budget.

Mr. Lilley: The current account deficit is forecast to remain below 1 per cent. of national income in 1988.

Mr. McAllion: Is the Minister aware that the CBI trend survey for March suggested that manufactured imports would grow more than twice as fast as exports in 1988? If so, will he explain to the House why the Chancellor gave away billions of pounds in tax cuts to the rich in the same month? Does he not understand that, as well as being socially divisive and unjust, those tax cuts can only serve to damage the long-term economic interests of the nation? They will lead to the sucking in of even more imports and thereby worsen an already critical trade imbalance.

Mr. Lilley: Our forecast for the balance of payments in the coming year is based on the tax cuts that were announced in the Budget. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that instead of running a surplus of £3 billion we should run a surplus of £7 billion. We are running a surplus on public account, and he believes that that has some impact on the balance of payments. So far, our track record in forecasting the economy is much better than that of most outside bodies. Of course, there is a degree of uncertainty about it, but we believe that that is the best estimate that can be made.

Mr. Turner: Is it not right that, on the Government's own estimates, we are facing in the current year a deficit of £4 billion, that, even worse, in the first two months there is a deficit of £1·6 billion, and that tax cuts will only suck in more imports? Why can the Government not recognise that the Budget was no good for the poor or for the economy?

Mr. Lilley: The deficit forecast for the coming year is, at less than 1 per cent. of GDP, a fraction of the deficits that were run by the previous Labour Government. It is clearly easily manageable. I repeat the point that I made earlier. If the hon. Gentleman is against any tax reductions in the Budget, he is presumably in favour of running an even larger surplus, which is the exact opposite of the Labour party's policy at the time of the election.

Sir William Clark: Does my hon. Friend agree that the small balance of payments deficit that we are facing is easily contained in the huge reserves that Britain now has, compared with the overall deficit of the previous Labour Government? Since 1979 this Government have had a £20 billion surplus on the balance of payments.

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is quite correct. As a country, not only do we have large official reserves, but we have large net assets overseas amounting to some $90 billion. That puts us in a much stronger position than we were under the last Labour Government.

Mr. McCrindle: In view of the sizeable increase in net disposable income which will derive from the Budget tax cuts, and the possibility that some of that spending will be on imported goods, will my hon. Friend pay some attention to the possible effect on our balance of payments of such a move? In particular, will he reassure me that the whole business of control of credit is being given some attention at the Treasury, as to some of us it seems to be getting out of control?

Mr. Lilley: The estimates and projections that we have made take into account the effect of tax deductions on expenditure. I can assure my hon. Friend that the growth that we forecast will be very balanced. We expect consumer expenditure to grow somewhat less rapidly in the coming year than it did in the last year—by some 4 per cent. By contrast, we expect business investment to grow at 9 per cent. per annum. We envisage very strongly investment-led growth in the coming year. Naturally, we keep an eye on credit, and we believe that credit growth is perfectly containable at the moment.

Mr. John Smith: In view of the fact that the current account figures for the months so far this year have been very bad indeed, and that the deficit appears to be getting steadily worse, will the Minister tell the House clearly and precisely what is the Government's strategy for reducing the deficit in the balance of payments?

Mr. Lilley: Clearly it is too early to come to conclusions on the basis of the first two months of the year, when there may well have been exceptional factors resulting from the introduction of the single administrative document. We never make changes in forecasts on the basis of the figures for one or two months. We believe that the sort of deficit we are forecasting is easily containable, and, as I pointed out, it is substantially smaller than that which the Labour Government seemed content to run.

Personal Incomes

12. **Mr. McLeish:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the weekly gain of a single person earning £300,000 a year from his Budget tax changes.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Just over £1,000 for an individual with no reliefs other than the single person's allowance.

Mr. McLeish: Is it not ridiculous in the present day that that answer confirms the fact that an income tax saving of £1,037 per week will accrue to someone earning £300,000 a year? Was the Minister not in the House yesterday to hear the Secretary of State for Social Services describe his cuts for the poor as a charter for self-respect? In view of that, will he give an assurance to the House that the next Budget will be one-nation Budget whereby the poor get richer as an incentive, rather than being ground into the dust as they are at present?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman concentrates on an extraordinarily small proportion of the tax-paying public, and a very small part of the cost of the higher rate reductions,. Even of the higher rate reductions, 60 per cent. of the gainers are earning less than £40,000, which shows, incidentally, that the point made by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) was wholly wrong arithmetically.

Mr. Boswell: Will my right hon. Friend tell the House exactly how many taxpayers are in that position, and by how much the basic rate of tax for the rest of us could have been reduced if their gain had been taken away entirely?

Mr. Lamont: It certainly would not have enabled any reduction in the basic rate for the rest of us.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: Is it not clear that the large majority of ordinary taxpayers will be paying tax at 25 per cent. and national insurance contributions at 9 per cent. —a total of 34 per cent. and the higher taxpayers in the land will be paying only 40 per cent.? Therefore, the difference between the people at the bottom and the people at the top paying tax is only 6 per cent. It is not clear that we are now coming to the end of progressive taxation, which has been embraced by every Administration this century until this one?

Mr. Lamont: No. It would be quite wrong to say that the tax system was still not progressive. I point out to Opposition Members that a person on five times average earning will still be paying 10 times the amount of tax of a person on average earnings.

Income Tax

13. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has as to what will be the higher rates of income tax in each of the major industrial countries in 1988-89.

18. **Mr. Sackville:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has about the higher rates of income tax in each of the major industrial countries in 1988-89.

Mr. Major: The higher rate of income tax in the United Kingdom is now one of the lowest of any major industrial country. I shall arrange for the relevant information to be placed in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Taylor: I thank my right hon. Friend for that information. Does it not prove that as a result of the Budget Britain is one of the most attractive countries internationally? Will it not lead to an increased number of industries moving into this country, providing more jobs and thus increasing the amount of revenue coming to the Exchequer, for the benefit of all citizens?

Mr. Major: We certainly hope and expect that there will be an increased flow of inward investment. However, there has been a substantial amount of inward investment in recent years. There was £6·1 billion in 1987 alone, the largest figure ever recorded, and £2·6 million in Scotland alone over the past few years.

Mr. Sackville: Does my right hon. Friend agree that penal rates of taxation damage the economy as a whole and help no section of society? Does he further accept that there may be no economic justification for any level of income tax higher than the basic rate?

Mr. Major: I am certainly prepared to agree with my hon. Friend on the subject of penal taxation. The subject of a single rate of taxation might be a matter for another day. However, I recall that Mr. Disraeli once proposed the abolition of taxation in an election manifesto and lost.

Mr. Tom Clarke: In view of the proposals for capital taxation, why does the Government's philosophy of easing dependence apply to those who seek social security but not to those who benefit from inherited wealth? Can the Minister offer a scrap of evidence that the sons or daughters of those who benefit from unearned income will use that for the greater good? Why should they be dependent? Why should the enterprise ethic apply purely to the poorest of the poor?

Mr. Major: I am not entirely sure that the hon. Gentleman's question follows from the specific question on the Order Paper. In any event, I think that his premise is wholly mistaken.

Dr. Reid: Do not the Minister's answers represent two-nation Toryism at its worst? Does he recall the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) that a single person earning over £300,000 a year will benefit by £1,000 a week? Will he contrast that with the admission made yesterday by the Prime Minister that a single person earning less than £50 a week will be £7·80 a week worse off after the social security cuts? Does that not represent two nations, or are they both part of the same big happy family?

Mr. Major: Perhaps I might remind the hon. Gentleman that before any tax cuts were contemplated in the Budget an extra £2,000 million was allocated to social security expenditure for the forthcoming year. On the matter of higher and lower rates of tax, I must say that high taxes do not redistribute income; all they do is redistribute it to taxpayers and that is of no use to anyone.

Following is the information:

Higher rates of income tax (percentage) for a married couple without children Group of Seven countries

Country	*Top rates(s)* [1] [2] [3] [4]	*Total number of rate-bands*
Canada	39 43·5	3
France	49 53·9 56·8	13
Germany	56	n/a
Italy	53 58 62	9
Japan	65 72 78	12
United Kingdom	40	2
USA	34·7	2

Notes to figures in table:

1. The rates relate to employment income; it is assumed that this is all earned by the husband.
2. The figures reflect the latest enacted rates, as far as is known.
3. The figures for Canada include provisional taxes at the rate for Ontario; those for Japan include local taxes at the typical rate; those for the USA include State taxes at the Californian rate.
4. The German income tax system does not have rate bands as such. Rates rise gradually from the starting rate of 22 per cent. until the top rate of 56 per cent. is reached.

Married Couples (Taxation)

14. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received since the Budget about his proposals for separate taxation of married couples.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend's proposals have been widely welcomed.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Will the proposals end the iniquitous tax on marriage and ensure that a married couple pay no more tax than two single people? Will it also stop the taxation of a wife's savings income at her husband's marginal rate of tax? If it will do those things, has my right hon. Friend received the congratulations of the Opposition Front Bench, or are the Opposition embarrassed about not having done that when they had the chance?

Mr. Lamont: We have not received any representations from the Opposition on this matter. My hon. Friend is right. The significance of this change is that it ends a 180-year anomaly whereby a married woman's income is aggregated with that of her husband and she does not fill in her own tax return. That is obviously wholly wrong and wholly inappropriate today.

Ms. Armstrong: Will the Minister recognise that the only thing that this has done is ensure that women can fill in their own forms? As for gaining any benefit, that is much less likely. Will he confirm that it is still the Government's intention that what used to be the married man's allowance is, in effect, still going to be the married man's allowance because it will be paid to the husband irrespective of the wishes or the earnings of the wife?

Mr. Lamont: On the second point, no, I do not accept that because, as the hon. Lady knows, since she participated in the debate on the Budget, it is possible for the husband to transfer the unused portion of the allowance to the wife. Secondly, when the hon. Lady says that it is far from certain that these changes will be of benefit to people, she is way off the mark: 1·6 million women will pay less tax. Half of those are elderly people, and 165,000 elderly couples will be taken out of tax completely. I do not call that a rather marginal change. I think that it is a major change.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will my hon. Friend give some attention to the proposal whereby the basic tax allowance for a mother could be transferred, in the case of a non-working mother, to the husband, as an encouragement to those mothers who stay at home to look after their children?

Mr. Lamont: I shall look at the point that my hon. Friend makes, but I think that I have partly answered that in the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong). In most cases what we propose via the transfer will ensure the right result and that the allowances are used in the way that most benefits the married couple.

Dr. Marek: Can the Minister tell the House how many super-rich couples will benefit as a result of these proposals and by how much per week, in cash terms, on their unearned income, if they arrange their tax affairs to the best of their ability?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman, like the Opposition in general, is obsessed by the super-rich. The significance of this change is that 1·6 million women will pay less tax.

The Opposition make the wrong assumption, namely, that the only people who have any savings are rich people, whereas all married women with savings who at the moment have their tax aggregated with their husband's will benefit very significantly from this reform.

Personal Incomes

15. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much in real terms he expects take-home pay for a married man, with two children, on average earnings to have risen between 1978-79 and 1988-89.

Mr. Major: I expect his real take-home pay to have risen by 27½ per cent. between 1978-79 and 1988-89. This compares with about one half of 1 per cent. between 1973-74 and 1978-79.

Mr. Hughes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the very welcome answer that he has given the House this afternoon shows that it is this Government who have a real commitment to helping ordinary families on ordinary incomes and to tackling family poverty? Further, will he tell the House how many people have been taken out of taxation altogether as a result of last month's Budget?

Mr. Major: On the last point, 780,000 people who would otherwise have paid it have been taken out of tax as a result of the Budget. My hon. Friend is entirely right in that real take-home pay will be substantially up at all multiples of average earnings, whereas with the 1973 to 1979 position quite the reverse occurred.

Economic Assistance (Leicester)

16. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he proposes to take to assist the local economy in Leicester.

Mr. Brooke: The Government's economic policy is creating the conditions for the economy to flourish in all parts of the country. For example, unemployment in the Leicester, East constituency has fallen by over 20 per cent. in the past year.

Mr. Vaz: Does the Minister agree that one way in which the Government could positively affect the economy in Leicester would be by the Treasury releasing to the Department of the Environment the £30 million that has been stolen from the people of Leicester through cuts in the housing investment programme? Does he not accept that the expenditure of these resources would provide more jobs and more homes for people in Leicester?

Mr. Brooke: I think that the economy of Leicester is doing very well indeed without the suggestion of the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Ashby: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the economy of Leicester is much improved as a result of the Budget? Has he seen the great welcome which has been given by the business men of Leicestershire to the Budget proposals? Is he aware that they say that it will increase the economic growth of the area?

Mr. Brooke: I understand that that excellent newspaper, the *Leicester Mercury*, started its article on the morrow of the Budget with the words:

"Reaction from Leicestershire's business community suggests that Lawson's tax-slashing Budget could be the key to job-creating growth."

To remain within the rules of order, Mr. Speaker, I should explain that the Lawson referred to is my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Interest Rates

17. **Mr. Duffy:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the present level of interest rates.

Mr. Lilley: Bank base rates are 8 per cent.

Mr. Duffy: As exports and the balance of payments continue to attract concern, why has the Chancellor been so reluctant to ease interest rates? There can be few hon. Members on either side who have not received appeals from local industry in recent months.

Mr. Lilley: Interest rates are at a level which keeps monetary policy bearing down on inflation. That is our first priority. But it is clear from the buoyancy of business and business intentions that investment intentions are strong. As I mentioned earlier, investment is projected to grow by 9 per cent. in the coming year and manufacturing investment by 11·5 per cent.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 14 April.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall have further meetings later today.

Mrs. Ewing: How can the Prime Minister, in all conscience, sleep easily in her bed at night when she knows that thousands of poor, the elderly and the handicapped have lost as much as £20 per week as a result of the vicious changes in housing benefit legislation?

The Prime Minister: Because on the whole our reforms have targeted help on the disabled and on low-income families, particularly those who have low pay. There have been changes in housing benefit, as the hon. Lady is aware, with a capital limit of some £6,000. Even so, the amount spent on housing benefit by the people will still be more in real terms than in 1979. We shall still be in the position where every two households have not only to keep themselves but have to contribute to keeping every third household.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Is it not a true description of the function of the Prime Minister not to do the job of departmental Ministers but so to guide Government policy that the financial and economic strains in it lead to the greatest possible wealth creation, which the departmental Ministers can then distribute?

The Prime Minister: I would not leave all the wealth creation for departmental Ministers to distribute. We would not get wealth creation unless people were able to keep a bigger proportion of their earnings. That is the engine of wealth creation. It is the reason why we have a higher standard of living than ever before. It is the reason why now departmental Ministers, especially those

involved with social security, are spending a bigger proportion on social security than ever before and a bigger proportion of the national income.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister now agree that the flat-rate poll tax should be replaced by a system which is more closely related to people's ability to pay?

The Prime Minister: The community charge takes into account people's ability to pay.—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman of course will be aware that those on income support receive an average payment to pay the 20 per cent. which they would otherwise have to pay out of their income. Above that, there is a rebate from 80 per cent. Taking those two things together, it means between 7 and 8 million people do not pay the full community charge because of rebates.

Mr. Kinnock: Yes, or no.

The Prime Minister: I have given the right hon. Gentleman a much better answer than that.

Mr. Kinnock: For once, the Prime Minister could give a much better answer, which would be of interest to me and to my hon. Friends, and I am sure to her mates, too.

The Prime Minister: May I make three quick points just to try to get it across to the right hon. Gentleman. The first one is this. In England the community charge meets only a quarter of local authority expenditure. Between 7 million and 8 million people will not have to pay the community charge in full, because of rebates or extra income support. Finally, 10 per cent. of households with the highest income will pay 15 times as much towards the cost of local services as the 10 per cent. of households with the lowest incomes.

Sir Bernard Braine: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the widespread interest in this House and in the country in the meeting which she had yesterday with Mother Teresa of Calcutta? After meeting this very remarkable woman, does she agree with Mother Teresa's assertion that the poorest nations on earth are those that substitute the violence of abortion on demand for love and practical help? Will my right hon. Friend therefore ensure that the amended Bill before the House at the moment, which had a substantial majority on Second Reading and which has passed its Committee stage after reasonable debate and amendment, will have a fair run, and will not be baulked, and that the nation, where we have a majority on this issue, will not be baulked either?

The Prime Minister: As my right hon. Friend is aware, every person in this House has the greatest respect and affection for Mother Teresa and for the work that she does. Even though we might disagree with her on one or two things, we still admire and respect her views. My right hon. Friend is very persuasive, but he knows the position with regard to private Members' time. The Government do not give time for private Members' Bills. Private Members are able to take advantage of every procedure with regard to Committees, which is known to them in full.

Q2. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 14 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Illsley: What message does the Prime Minister have for more than 3,000 school children in Barnsley who have lost their entitlement to free school meals as a result of her Government's means-test mentality, which has brought about the recent social security reforms?

The Prime Minister: This is taken into account in the cash benefits which are available. However much the hon. Gentleman may try to denigrate them, the economic policy of this Government has led to higher payments on social security, at a time of falling unemployment, than ever before. They are levels that the Labour party could not have dreamt of: £46 billion, including £2 billion extra, an amount which means that working people—the working family—have to pay an average of £64 a week to keep social security going now; £32 a week to keep the National Health Service going, and a further £25 a week to keep education going.

Q3. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 14 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Does my right hon. Friend agree that when Governments of the past declared war on poverty, poverty always won because of a declining economy and a benefit system that was highly complicated and full of anomalies? Having put the economy right, will my right hon. Friend press on with the difficult but essential task of re-establishing the original aims of the welfare state, which were self-help where possible and accurate targeting of benefits for those who could not help themselves?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Sir. Public services can flourish only if we have a flourishing private sector. The private sector creates the necessary wealth to run the social services and to raise the standard of living. We should congratulate all working people on the excellent way in which they are responding and creating that wealth, and on the excellent way in which, after the reforms, it is targeted on those in greatest need—in other words, the disabled and families with children, particularly those on low incomes.

Q4. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 14 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Taylor: What advice does the Prime Minister give to the many sensible councils of all party political persuasions which have been hit by the proposed restrictions on barter deals? Some are run by the Conservative party. Carrick district council, for example, has plans for Truro city hall, and Restormel borough council has plans for St. Austell centre. Both are low-spending councils.

The Prime Minister: We have had to make changes in the capital position of councils because, as the hon. Gentleman is aware, too much creative accounting was going on and getting round some of the existing rules. That is why we had to take steps to change the position.

Mr. Wells: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the great benefits of the social security changes which have just been introduced is that they discourage young people from choosing to escape the authority of their parents by leaving home and living on social security benefits and not genuinely seeking work?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend is aware, social security is meant for those who need help because they genuinely cannot find work, are sick, or are too old to

work. We know some parents who have been worried that their young people have left home and gone on to the dole to have a flat when the parents felt that the young people could take a job.

Q5. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 14 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Welsh: Is the Prime Minister aware of the great concern felt by industry, commerce, trade unions, academics and other important groups on Tayside about any possible threatened closure of Dundee university dental school? It cannot make economic sense to spend millions of pounds on a new building elsewhere—*[Interruption.]*—and to threaten an existing efficient organisation and, consequently, Dundee dental hospital, as well as to impair the whole future of the university. *[Interruption.]* Will she lend her help to those groups on Tayside who are trying to save those important assets for the region?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman was kind enough to let me have notice of the question that he intended to ask. Otherwise, I could not have heard what it was. The working party of the University Grants Committee—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps the hon. Gentleman may be allowed to hear my reply as he asked a specific question. The working party of the UGC has recommended, among the measures, the withdrawal of the funding of the dental school at Dundee university. It is for the UGC to decide whether to accept and implement the working party's recommendation. However, the committee has consulted the universities, professional bodies and the Government Departments concerned so that all the implications for local dental services can be taken into account before a decision is reached. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: Despite the firm and clear assurances at the recent European Council meeting, the Brussels arrangements announced yesterday are that £225 million is to be spent every week this year on dumping and destroying food surpluses. Will the Prime Minister be willing to put up a fight in view of this breach of promise and this scandalous abuse of public money, which does massive damage to the Third world and which is an insult to every poor person in Europe?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend asks a complicated question, which could take a long time to answer. As he knows, surpluses and selling them off also damage the Third world as they affect agricultural economies. That is why we tried to do two things in the last Council meeting. We tried to reduce the increase in agricultural production—in some cases, by the price mechanism—and tried at the same time to write off the surpluses that are at present in store, as we hoped, that that would reduce the amount in store. We want to dispose of the surpluses as quickly as possible, preferably by 1992. When we get there, I am sure that my hon. Friend will approve of the policy decisions that we have taken.

Q6. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 14 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Sheerman: In this week, of all weeks, when so many people have been made poorer, when the poorest have been made even poorer still, how can the Prime Minister justify spending £300 per head on a business man's breakfast to launch the campaign for the inner cities?

The Prime Minister: I do not agree with the premise behind the hon. Gentleman's question. This week, in cash terms, there will be 5 million gainers from the social security reforms, 2 million people will not face a change in cash terms and there will be a decrease for less than 1 million people. As I stated earlier, we are doing as much as we can to help the inner cities. What the hon. Gentleman is really complaining about is that we are succeeding in presenting our policy properly.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): May I ask the Leader of the House to state the business for next week?

Mr. Speaker: Before the Leader of the House does that, the House will be aware that I attempt to call as many Back-Bench Members as possible to ask a business question. However, I am bound to have regard to the business already set down on a Thursday and also to the purpose of business questions, which is not so that hon. Members can make the speech that they hope to make on the subject of their choice, nor to obtain an instant ministerial reply, but to ask for a debate and to state briefly why it should be granted. To enable me to continue to be generous in calling supplementary questions to business questions, I ask Back-Benchers to confine themselves to one question each, and not to make speeches.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 18 APRIL, TUESDAY 19 APRIL, WEDNESDAY 20 APRIL, THURSDAY 21 APRIL—Progress on remaining stages of the Local Government Finance Bill (1st to 4th Allotted Days).

At the end of Tuesday, Ways and Means resolution relating to the Local Government Finance Bill, followed by motion relating to the Standard and Collective Charges (Scotland) Regulations.

At the end on Wednesday, motion relating to the Personal Community Charge (Students) (Scotland) Regulations.

FRIDAY 22 APRIL—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 25 APRIL—Completion of remaining stages of the Local Government Finance Bill (5th Allotted Day).

Mr. Dobson: I thank the Leader of the House for his statement and welcome the Government's decision to provide a record fifth day on the Floor of the House for the Report stage and Third Reading of the poll tax Bill.

In view of the rapidly changing international situation, are we likely to have a debate on foreign affairs?

In view of the importance attached in recent ministerial statements to the setting up of the Independent Living Fund to assist the most severely disabled people affected by the social security changes, will the right hon. Gentleman tell us when there will be a statement on its work, and whether its staff will exceed the one civil servant who is at present in post?

When will the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs be established? I remind the right hon. Gentleman that on 13 January he told the House that his hon. Friends who represent seats outside Scotland were perfectly entitled to serve on the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. When are they going to do just that?

Finally, the Leader of the House will recall that we asked for consideration of the abolition of the Inner London education authority to be deferred pending the outcome of the parents' ballot, the Government having no mandate at the election for the abolition of ILEA. What they did have a mandate for—I quote from the Tory election manifesto—was to "increase parental choice." As 94 per cent. of the parents of inner London have indicated that they want to save the Inner London education authority, does the right hon. Gentleman propose to have a further debate on the matter or, better still, to bring back that part of the Bill?

Mr. Wakeham: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he has said about providing extra time for the Local Government Finance Bill. As he said, we have five days. It is important that this measure be properly debated before it goes to the House of Lords.

I recognise the fast-moving international situation and the need for a foreign affairs debate in the not-too-distant future; and I will bear in mind what the hon. Gentleman said to me a minute ago.

We have spent a fair amount of time on social security recently. The hon. Gentleman, however, raised a question about the Independent Living Fund. I will refer it to the Secretary of State for Social Services and, if he feels it appropriate, I have no doubt that he will make a statement.

I am sorry that attempts to set up the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs have taken an enormous time and yet we have achieved nothing. I recognise that this causes some frustration in some quarters. The matter is with the Chairman of the Committee of Selection, and, no doubt, the Committee is considering how best to proceed. There is nothing I can do while the matter is with the Committee.

I also recognise the hon. Gentleman's particular interest in the Inner London education authority, but would remind him that the Education Reform Bill is now in another place. I have no doubt that we will be getting back to the subject in due course, but I do not think that it is appropriate to come back to it at present.

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): As a number of aspects of the conduct of the business of the House need to be considered in parallel with the work of the Select Committee on televising our proceedings, when may we expect to see the Select Committee on Procedure established?

Mr. Wakeham: We have certainly had a number of discussions, and I hope that it will be possible to re-establish the Select Committee on Procedure very shortly.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): May we have a statement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer next week on the meetings that he has been attending in Washington, where he seems to have espoused a doctrine of exchange rate stability which is not supported by the Prime Minister?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman wants to be careful if he puts provocative remarks to me, because I do not believe them to be true; however, I will refer his request to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on his return, and he will decide how best to proceed.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): In view of the very welcome statement last night that the new system of social security payments would be carefully monitored, will my right hon. Friend ask the Secretary of State for Social Services to give a detailed statement to the House next week explaining precisely how?

Mr. Wakeham: I thought that I heard my hon. Friend the Minister of State, in replying to the debate, say that he thought that the new scheme should settle down and that

we should then look at it and decide whether changes were necessary. Overnight is rather a short time in which to have a considered view of how it is working.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement next week, in advance of the votes on the poll tax Bill, to explain which Government Department has commissioned Gallup to send people scurrying around my constituency this week telling lies about the amount of poll tax to be paid in Birmingham by using the figure of £186 instead of £249? When asked, the interviewers said to my constituents, "Unofficially, it's a Government matter."

Mr. Wakeham: I will look into that for the hon. Gentleman. When Gallup interviewers go around my constituents, they ask questions, not answer them.

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): Are we anywhere near receiving a statement from the Home Secretary on the vexed question of the cost of television licences for elderly persons and the anomalies which have become evident in the present scheme in relation to sheltered accommodation? Does my right hon. Friend accept that there are few items which cause greater distress to elderly people than the seeming contradiction of the operation of this scheme?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that this is a very important matter, and also recognise my hon. Friend's concern about it. There are no immediate plans for the Home Secretary to make a statement on it, but I will certainly refer my hon. Friend's concern to him.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Inasmuch as the stock exchange surveillance department submitted a report to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry six weeks ago identifying between eight and 12 persons who were involved in criminal acts of insider dealing in the shares of Matthew Brown when it was taken over by Scottish and Newcastle Breweries, and inasmuch as that report is on the Secretary of State's desk with no action being taken, may we have a statement to the House as to why the Government are dragging their feet over the prosecution of criminals?

Mr. Wakeham: I have not seen the report, I do not know what it contains and I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has seen it. I shall refer the matter to my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State. I assure the hon. Gentleman that my right hon. and noble Friend will take every action appropriate in the circumstances.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): In view of the growing public concern about air safety arising from congestion in the south-eastern airports and the importance of air traffic to the development of the regions, does my right hon. Friend consider that a debate on this important subject is due?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that this is an important subject, and that when incidents occur they cause concern. The Accidents Investigation Branch is investigating the circumstances of the recent incident and it would be too soon to say what the outcome of the investigation may be. I recognise the need for a debate on these matters from time to time, and I shall see what can be done, but I cannot promise anything in the immediate future.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Is the Leader of the House aware of a report that has been published today by the director of social services in London, which shows a serious crisis, including a huge turnover of staff, 4,000 vacancies for social workers in London and a shortage of occupational therapists and speech therapists? Given the fact that those problems are widely shared throughout the United Kingdom—they are not helped by the crisis in the National Health Service or the social security changes—does the Leader of the House agree that there is an urgent need for a debate?

Mr. Wakeham: As the hon. Gentleman said, the report has been published today. The first thing to do is to read and study it and decide how best to proceed from there.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Will the Leader of the House set aside time for a debate on the workings of the Fraudulent Mediums Act 1951, which repealed the Witchcraft Act 1735? It is common knowledge in the House that many people have been charged with and convicted of offences against children involved in witchcraft initiation ceremonies. We need a chance to discuss the working of witchcraft and how it can be controlled in this country. *[Laughter.]* People laughed when I spoke nine years ago about child abuse. Those people are now listening, and I am warning the House that witchcraft is sweeping the country.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It is in Downing street.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a serious question.

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is quite right to pursue matters that he considers important and to bring them before the House. I wish that I could arrange time for a debate next week on the subject, but I am afraid that I cannot. Perhaps my hon. Friend will try his luck at an Adjournment debate in the near future.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): I welcome what the Leader of the House said about the urgency of a foreign affairs debate, but I press him hard about the brutality of the Israeli army in the occupied territories, with the terrible violence and killing and beating of men, women and children that is taking place, so that the Government will press for an international conference at which there could be a settlement about the middle east on the basis of a Palestinian state and an Israeli state standing side by side.

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Lady will know of the initiatives and pressure that the Government have been trying to bring to bear to reach a settlement in the middle east. What the hon. Lady says is controversial in some quarters, but nevertheless it is part of the serious middle east position and it adds to the strength of the case for a foreign affairs debate as soon as one can be arranged.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Before we have a foreign affairs debate, would it not be sensible to consider whether it is wise to wander all around the world in one debate discussing large areas in which we have no control and precious little interest? Would it not be better to target the debate on a particular area? Why not the middle east, as the hon. Lady suggested?

Mr. Wakeham: I shall certainly take note of what my hon. Friend says.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Pursuant to the issue of witchcraft, the Leader of the House will have been pleased to note that Mr. Speaker has given me an Adjournment debate on Friday on the conduct of the Prime Minister's private office. In view of early-day motions 228, 253, 272, 273, 286, 622 and 627, which Minister is in a position to answer?

[That this House notes in the book, Campaign, by Rodney Tyler, the Selling of the Prime Minister: from behind the doors of Downing Street and Conservative Central Office—A unique inside account of the Battle for Power that the author on page 1, chapter 1, paragraph 1, sentence 1, states 'It was an extraordinary turnaround in fortunes from the moment on 27th January 1986 when Mrs. Thatcher secretly confided to a close associate that she might have to resign . . .' and on page 3 that 'On the eve of the crucial Westland debate she herself felt shakey enough to doubt her future' though some around her later sought to dismiss this as late evening anxieties of the sort that had disappeared the following morning). It is certainly true that if Leon Brittan had chosen to, he could have brought her to the brink of downfall, by naming the real culprits inside Number 10. Instead, he chose to remain silent', and calls on the Prime Minister to give a full account of what transpired between 3rd January and 27th January 1986, at Number 10 Downing Street, in relation to the selectively leaked Law Office's letter concerning the Westland Affair.]

[That this House notes that the Member for Aldershot on page 136 of his book Heseltine: the unauthorised Biography, states in relation to the Westland Affair that 'John Wakeham issued an order of the day which contained the trite, if effective message, that it was time for all good men to come to the aid of the party. We did and calls on the Leader of the House, The Right Honourable Member for South Colchester and Maldon, to explain when he first knew the role of the then Trade and Industry Secretary, The Right Honourable Member for Richmond, Yorks, in the matter of the disclosure of a selectively leaked Law Officer's letter.]

[That this House notes that in his book Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution, published this week by Jonathan Cape and Co., Mr. Peter Jenkins writes, on page 200 'Brittan himself refused to enlighten the Select Committee on any point of substance. However, he is reputed to have told close friends subsequently that not only has she known perfectly well what had happened but that, on the day following the leak, had expressed her satisfaction to him at the way things had been handled. However at that time, the downfall of Heseltine had not been achieved. . . . He (Mr. Brittan) might point the finger at her (Mrs. Thatcher). Potentially he now had the power to destroy her'; and calls on the Prime Minister to give the House a full account of her conversations with the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the Right Honourable Member for Richmond, Yorks, over the period from 3rd January and 27th January 1986, in relation to the selectively leaked Law Officer's letter concerning the Westland Affair.]

[That this House notes that in The Thatcher Years—A decade of Revolution in British Politics, published by BBC Books, Mr. John Cole, on page 170, considering the selectively leaked Law Officer's letter in the Westland Affair, writes 'why did he (Sir Robert Armstrong) not give her a quick interim report when he discovered that the leak was an inside job, authorised by her office? Why did Leon Brittan not tell her? Or the private secretary concerned? Or his chief, who site in the same room? Or her press secretary? And why did she never ask?; and calls on the Prime Minister to inform the House of the answers to these questions.]

[That this House notes that, in the book 'Not with Honour—The Inside Story of the Westland Scandal', on page 142, Magnus Linklater and David Leigh write that 'Instead, following Havers's complaint, she spoke privately to Brittan about the leak. Although this is something the Prime Minister has failed to disclose, to widespread disbelief, the evidence comes from an authoritative source, who told us: "The Prime Minister knew about the leak. She was pleased it had been done. There was a meeting between Brittan and her after the complaint from Mayhew. Only the two of them were present . . . Brittan assumed she knew of [the leak's] origins. You must draw your own conclusions." One of Brittan's friends adds, "Nobody thought it was a problem. The complaints were out of the public domain and any inquiry was expected to be a formality. Leon wasn't worried at all about it."; and calls on the Prime Minister to give a full account to the House of the meeting between herself and Right honourable Member for Richmond, Yorks, referred to therein.]

[That this House notes that in an article by Mr. Paul Foot in the Daily Mirror, dated 28th January, a Ministry of Defence official, Mr. Paul Newbigin, is quoted as having admitted witnessing the shredding and incinerating of the log book of HMS 'Conqueror'; is concerned that if this statement is true, the Ministry of Defence is guilty of having established an entirely bogus investigation into the disappearance of the log book when the facts of its deliberate destruction were already known; further notes the parallel between this case and that of the leaked Solicitor General's letter in the Westland Affair, when a similar investigation was launched despite the availability in advance of all the salient facts; and calls upon the Secretary of State for Defence to set up an immediate inquiry with the genuine purpose of furnishing Parliament with a full explanation of this bizarre series of events.]

[That this House calls for a debate on the conduct of honourable and right honourable Members of the House, considering the position of back bench members who resort to unparliamentary language and Heads of Government who misuse Law Officer's letters and then display lack of conduct about what they have done.]

Will the right hon. Gentleman support my letter to the Prime Minister, which states that on this occasion only she can give an authoritative answer? Would she, therefore, be prepared to come to the House herself?

Will the Leader of the House also explain on what point of law and at what cost the Government took the decision to insult the Scottish Appeal Court and appeal to the House of Lords in relation to Cavendish?

Mr. Wakeham: I have a suspicion that if I were to attempt to answer the hon. Gentleman—I have no intention of doing so—I would stray wider than you wanted, Mr. Speaker, from the business for next week, which includes, as the hon. Gentleman rightly pointed out, an Adjournment debate on Friday, in which he will doubtless speak and in which a competent Minister will give him an adequate answer—but I doubt very much whether it will be the Prime Minister.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. For the sake of accuracy, the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) should know that he was successful in the ballot; I did not "give him" an Adjournment debate.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): When may we expect a statement on the Government's response to the unilateral changes made by the Parliament of the Irish Republic to the extradition arrangements between our two countries?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot give my hon. Friend the answer, but I shall certainly refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Will the Leader of the House ask the Home Secretary for a statement on the allegation in today's *Independent* that the Government have now accepted that DNA blood testing is indisputable proof of people's parentage? People such as Jack Tar Singh in my constituency, therefore, were clearly wrongly refused entry to the country and kept away from their families, and the Government behaved disgracefully in that respect.

Can this statement also include an explanation of how it can apparently happen that a convicted terrorist is allowed to live in this country while decent, honourable people, who are entitled to live here, are kept out?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. and learned Gentleman has raised two separate points, both of which relate to the Department of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. I do not think I can give him a detailed answer, but I shall refer his points to my right hon. Friend.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that hon. Members will not be tempted to raise two points, in view of what I have said today.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): On the subject of a bit of French witchcraft, will my right hon. Friend arrange an early debate on the proposition from President Mitterrand, as reported in today's press, that the Channel tunnel should be called after a French gentleman named Jean Monet? Will my right hon. Friend organise an early fight back on behalf of English names and a competition to that end? As a first entry, and in memory of those who are good at digging themselves into holes, how about the "Dave Nellist Channel tunnel"?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend makes a helpful suggestion, but there is nothing that I can usefully say on that subject at the moment. However, I shall refer it to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): The visit of Mother Teresa to the Prime Minister was mentioned earlier. Will it be possible to have a debate on the plight of the homeless, particularly those in London? Mother Teresa said that she was deeply moved that so many people had only a cardboard box for a bed. Surely we should have an opportunity to discuss this important matter?

Mr. Wakeham: There is a Bill going through the House which relates to housing matters. It is highly relevant to this matter, and I cannot promise a separate debate in the immediate future, however important the subject is.

Mr. John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): In view of the unsatisfactory state of affairs over the hijacking in Algiers, and the unwelcome news that the terrorist Proll will soon be entering the country, may we have a debate on how to combat international terrorism?

Mr. Wakeham: This is an important subject and one on which I should like to have a debate, but I cannot promise my hon. Friend a debate in the immediate future.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Will the Leader of the House ensure that sufficient time is set aside during the debate on the poll tax to discuss the importance of the Government amendment affecting the finance of local transport? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that this amendment threatens further to disrupt transport in the metropolitan areas, especially in Tyne and Wear, which had a transport system that was the envy of the world until the Government began interfering with it?

Mr. Wakeham: I do not think that I can be faulted for having provided five days for discussion on the Local Government Finance Bill, which by any standards is pretty generous. The selection of amendments and decisions on how the debate is conducted are not matters for me.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Can my right hon. Friend find a way for the House to discuss the important decisions being taken in Washington this week, in which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is taking part? The international monetary system crucially affects our domestic economy, and it is necessary for us, soon after he returns, to discuss the issues which my right hon. Friend has been addressing in Washington.

Mr. Wakeham: I have agreed that I shall refer this matter to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. The Finance Bill was published today and the Second Reading will enable some of those matters to be discussed. I recognise my hon. Friend's request, and shall refer it to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Before we proceed to the Report stage of the poll tax Bill next Monday, will it be possible to have a debate on whether there should be a referendum on this one subject, in view of the feelings in the country? Will the Leader of the House bear in mind also the possibility of having a secret ballot in the Cabinet? All the reports reveal that, without the involvement of the Chief Whip, there would probably be a majority in the Cabinet for dropping the poll tax.

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman's obsession with conspiracies is well known. I assure him that there is a united Cabinet—I was going to say, and a pretty united party—on this issue. We have plenty of time to discuss these matters, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will clarify any misunderstandings. I expect that the Bill will proceed very satisfactorily.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Since this is the fourth business questions in a row in which the Leader of the Opposition has done his disappearing act, will my right hon. Friend arrange through the usual channels for the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) to have a chance at the Dispatch Box, or perhaps the hon. Members for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) and for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott)?

Mr. Wakeham: It is traditional for the Leader of the Opposition to ask for the business statement; that is a long-established practice. When he is not able to be here, he is always very courteous and tells me so, and I know that he has a lot on his plate at the moment. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) then stands in. I will not say that he does a better job than the Leader of the Opposition, but he has done a very adequate job.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Is the Leader of the House aware that some local authorities have been waiting for more than a year for a decision from the Home Office on the granting of concessionary television licences to new sheltered accommodation? In view of this delay, which is claimed because of a court case brought by the local authorities against the Home Office, should there not be a statement to the House by the Home Office on whether it will tell the local authorities when those licences will be granted?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot add anything to what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle). I recognise that there is concern about this matter in some areas, and I have promised to refer it to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Will my right hon. Friend urgently consider having a debate on the control of gipsies and other travelling people? Many people in my constituency are frustrated that the law does not seem to enable them to move people on from unauthorised sites when they invade privacy. Will my right hon. Friend ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to reconsider the Caravan Sites Act 1968 and ask my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to consider the provisions of the Public Order Act 1986?

Mr. Wakeham: Certainly, as a Member for an Essex constituency, I recognise that there are difficulties in the working of that legislation. I cannot promise my hon. Friend a debate in the immediate future, but he may find an opportunity in an Adjournment debate to raise some of the issues. I shall refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): As the vast majority of the people of Bradford, including large numbers of single and married pensioners, stand to lose under the poll tax, the Leader of the House will understand the interest in the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Hampshire, West, which offers some mitigation of the Bill's worst aspects. Can the Leader of the House say when the amendment is to be moved? Do the Government intend to accept it and, if not, will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for special protection for the hon. Member for Hampshire, West and his supporters from the ravages of the Patronage Secretary and the Whips over the weekend?

Mr. Wakeham: The Member concerned is my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates), but that is a minor point. The selection of amendments is not a matter for me; nor is the attitude that the Government will take to the amendment, which is a matter for the Minister responsible for the Bill. However, if I had a crystal ball, I would think it quite likely that the amendment, if selected, would be debated on Monday. While I have no idea what view the Minister will take, having looked at the amendment myself I can see some fairly obvious defects in it.

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): Will my right hon. Friend consider giving the House an early opportunity to debate the recent North report on the review of road traffic law, not least to reflect the public concern, which I share, about the inadequacy of penalties for drinking and driving and killing while so doing?

Mr. Wakeham: I am very concerned about this myself, as my hon. Friend will know, because I have some responsibilities for these matters within the Government. The Government are studying the report at the moment and we shall come forward with our conclusions on it, I hope fairly speedily. We can then consider whether we should have a debate.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Leader of the House invite the Secretary of State for Energy to make a statement about the importation of South African coal into Britain, which reduces the number of job opportunities throughout the coalfields in Scotland, England and Wales? Will the Leader of the House draw the attention of his right hon. Friend to the fact that the South African coal directors were due to come over to Britain and tell him that the House would call upon him and ask that neither he nor any of his Ministers meet those South African coal directors who will put further jobs in jeopardy——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Too long.

Mr. Skinner: —and, far from the Government being involved in sanctions, they would be inviting more South African coal into Britain—coal that would have blood on it?

Mr. Wakeham: I do not accept very much of what the hon. Gentleman says, but I shall certainly refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I welcome my right hon. Friend's earlier comments about the establishment of a Procedure Committee, but will he find time, in our busy schedule, for a debate on the conduct of the House? The country at large is deeply shocked and offended by recent events in the Chamber. Is it not time that we addressed this matter, as a House, before further dishonour is brought upon this place?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that there is concern and I share that concern. This is a matter that the Select Committee on Procedure, which I hope to establish soon, can consider, but whatever the penalties and whatever the arrangements made, they will not compensate for a lack of self-discipline and common sense on the part of hon. Members.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Will the right hon. Gentleman reconsider the reply that he gave my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) about an early debate on homelessness? Is it not clear that all those who saw Mother Teresa on television must have been moved by what she said about the London homeless sleeping in cardboard boxes and her equating that with what happens in India? Is it not a disgrace that in this great country of ours—a very rich country—we have people living in cardboard boxes at night? Is it not clear that the Government should arrange an early debate

so that we can discuss this matter—rather than leaving it to a Bill which will do nothing about the problem—and express our opinions on this vital question?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that this is an important issue, but I do not see any opportunity for a debate in Government time in the immediate future. It is a matter to which we can return when we have a further opportunity.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): Given the continued occupation by Turkish troops, for 14 years, of the Republic of Cyprus—a Commonwealth country for which we have specific treaty obligations—may we have a statement on the progress made last week during the visit to Turkey by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister towards a settlement in relation to the partition of the island?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot promise a statement on the matter, but I will certainly refer the point raised by my hon. Friend to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Community Charge Registration (Strathclyde)

3.59 pm

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the community charge registration procedures at present being followed in Strathclyde region and this morning's court judgment in relation to it."

Against the background of the extremely complex tax that has been imposed and the equally complex registration form that has been put out, it is widely recognised that a great many questions have to be asked and I suspect that that is the reason for allowing 21 days for the form to be completed. In Strathclyde region, however, the registration officer has chosen to use a system in which canvassers leave cards calling for the form to be filled in for collection three days later.

A constituent phoned me last week in deep anxiety. His mother had a stroke some weeks ago and his stepfather is also ill. When he went to see them on Sunday, they were anxious about the form and he helped them to fill it in. As they did not know which of them would be the "responsible person", he properly assisted them, and the form was sent back on Sunday night. Monday was a holiday, but on Tuesday the canvasser returned with the form and the letter but with no answer to their question, although the form drew attention in note No. 1 to their right to ask such questions.

That kind of fear and harassment, as it is perceived, is happening throughout the Strathclyde region. A case was therefore taken to the sheriff court in Glasgow seeking an interim interdict. In her ruling——

Mr. Speaker: One minute more.

Mr. Buchan: In her ruling, the sheriff said that the collection cards had no legal basis whatever and, somewhat bizarrely, she was unable to grant an interdict because they had no statutory force.

For that reason, and because we have only 21 days, it is important that Parliament should pronounce, because for technical reasons a judge could not make a decision on the matter. The matter is specific because it affects not only my constituents but the constituents of every Member in Strathclyde region.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the community charge registration procedures at present being followed in Strathclyde region and this morning's court judgment in relation to it."

I have listened with interest and concern to what the hon. Gentleman has said on the matter. As he knows, my duty in considering whether to grant a Standing Order No. 20 debate is to decide whether it should receive precedence over the business set down, in this case for this evening. I regret that I cannot find the matter raised by the hon. Gentleman appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20 and I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House.

Scottish Business (Selection)

4.1 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am most grateful to you, and I am conscious of the pressure of business. I wish to raise two matters connected with the selection and calling of the Standing Committee which is to consider the School Boards (Scotland) Bill.

As you may know, Mr. Speaker, the Committee was selected yesterday and has 18 members. One slightly curious factor is that we welcome the hon. Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) to the consideration of Scottish business. I mention that merely in passing. The important point is that, under Standing Order No. 86(2)(i), the Committee must include 16 hon. Members representing Scottish constituencies. As in the past, that has been achieved by selecting nine Scottish Members from the Conservative Benches, six from the Labour Benches and one who I believe is a Liberal.

One of the Conservative Members is the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Mr. Fairbairn), who is well known in the House but who, sadly, through circumstances entirely beyond his control, will be unable to take part in the business of the Committee at least for some considerable time. I should make it absolutely clear that I imply no possible fault on the part of the hon. and learned Gentleman. None of us can cater for illness. Indeed, it is appropriate to wish the hon. and learned Gentleman a very speedy recovery. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] He is a long-standing friend of mine and very good value in the House, although his contributions are perhaps better appreciated by the Opposition than by his own party. We all wish him a speedy recovery.

It is extraordinary, however, that we are reduced to appointing to a highly sensitive and controversial Committee a Member who, at least for a considerable time, will be unable to take any part in its proceedings. I understand why this has happened. It is because there must be 16 Scottish members on the Committee. It is a comment on the Government's weakness in Scotland—a comment which is eloquent in itself and distressing in its implications.

I seek your guidance, Mr. Speaker, first, as to whether it is possible to direct the Committee of Selection or to amend the present selection in some way so that the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross can be taken off the Committee, which I am sure would be a relief to him, and some other Scottish Member could be added. I make no comment about which Member it should be, but it would be possible to find that 16th member from any one of four areas of the House—the Conservatives, the Labour party or one of the two smaller parties.

I do not wish to be partisan about that, but it is in the interests of the House that there should be 16 Scottish Members in a position to fulfil their duties on the Committee, which the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross clearly cannot. It is a mark of the totally unsatisfactory way in which Scottish business is being run that we have been put into this position.

The second point that I wish to raise with you, Mr. Speaker, is perhaps a technical one, but it has significant implications. The Second Reading of the School Boards (Scotland) Bill took place on Tuesday this week. The Committee of Selection met yesterday and some of the Members appointed to the Committee on the Bill knew of their appointment only this morning, when they received their cards in the post. Unless Scottish Members stay down here on Friday especially for the purpose, which is unusual, they will have only one day in which to put down amendments for a Committee next Tuesday. I appreciate that there is no statutory rule about this, but it seems a thoroughly unsatisfactory state of affairs on such an important Bill.

The final point on which I seek your help, Mr. Speaker, concerns the fact that hon. Members knew of their appointment to the Committee because they received a card summoning them to a meeting of the Committee next Tuesday. I have before me the card sent to my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg). The card is timed 11 pm last night and I understand that my hon. Friend received it in the post this morning. I may be wrong, although I have made every proper inquiry that I can, but I believe that at the time when the cards were received no Chair had been appointed for the Committee. I understand it to be a rule of the House that it is the Chairman's prerogative to decide when the Committee first meets.

It seems to me, therefore, that the Committee was summoned—by whom, I know not—at a time when no Member had been appointed to the Chair, that the Committee was thus wrongly summoned and that the meeting called for Tuesday must therefore be incompetent. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to rule accordingly. If the cards were not validly issued, Tuesday's meeting cannot be validly called and I ask you to rule to that effect. In my view, if a Chair has since been appointed it would be quite wrong for new and perhaps valid cards to be issued now at such short notice for a meeting on Tuesday. I therefore ask for your protection, Mr. Speaker, and an assurance that the Committee will not meet on Tuesday.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) was kind enough to give me some knowledge of the points that he intended to raise, which has enabled me to look carefully into the matter.

As for the appointment of a Chairman to the Scottish Standing Committee, I understand that there was some difficulty in contacting another Member, which resulted in a delay in my making the formal appointment of the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox). That has now been done, and the summoning of the first meeting has been validated. When that meeting should be is not a matter for me. I suggest that in the first instance that matter should be pursued through the usual channels.

The possibility that one Member appointed to the Committee may not be able to attend it should be drawn to the attention of the Chairman of the Committee of Selection.

Mr. Dewar: First, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for those remarks. I take it from what you say that I am right—you have clearly said that I am right—in my presumption that the Committee has not yet been called because the only cards issued were issued at a time when it was not possible to call the Committee. Therefore, I think that it is clear that we do not know when the Committee will meet at this stage.

I repeat for the benefit of the Leader of the House that, given that the Committee has not been called, it would be insupportable to try to call it now for Tuesday. That would be unacceptable.

This is a matter of some seriousness. The House should be careful about how it conducts its business. I am sorry that the matter has been personalised as a result of the unfortunate circumstances of my good friend the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Mr. Fairbairn), but when we could clearly meet the 16 Scots requirement by other methods, I would take it amiss if we went along with an arrangement whereby someone was appointed as a blank, through circumstance, to make up numbers. That would mean that the proper scrutiny of Scottish legislation was not being carried out and would be something of an insult to the process of statutory scrutiny in Britain.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that I can add anything further to what I have already said. I hope that the matter will be resolved.

Orders of the Day

Health and Medicines Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

Clause 7

DENTAL SERVICES

4.11 pm

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): I beg to move amendment No. 60, in page 6, line 19, leave out 'and'.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 59, in page 6, line 27, at end insert:

'(c) The Secretary of State shall be required to provide dental inspection for pupils in attendance at schools who have opted out of local education authority control'.

No. 61, in page 6, line 27, at end insert:

'; and

(c) the following paragraph shall be added following subsection (2) (services the Secretary of State has power to provide)—

'(3) The Secretary of State shall report annually to parliament on the state of Dental Health and on trends in the incidence of dental disease in each health district, indicating in each case whether the corresponding health authority provides a school dental service.'.'.

Mr. Fearn: Amendment No. 60 is merely a paving amendment. Amendment No. 59 makes it clear that the dental inspection service should be available in all maintained schools, not merely those under the control of local education authorities.

It seems to be the case that the Government's left hand does not know what their right hand is doing and that the Secretary of State for Social Services is not talking to the Secretary of State for Education about the Bill's effect. By moving an amendment to reimpose the duty in this case we are offering the Government an opportunity to admit that they have made a mistake.

Amendment No. 61 is important and is designed to allow Parliament to monitor the effect of the Government's change of policy. We fear that the effect of removing the present duty upon the Secretary of State will be that the dental health of children will deteriorate, or at least will not improve as fast as would otherwise be the case.

By keeping a close eye on what is happening we shall be able to see if that is so. I am working on the assumption that if the Government, or any future Government, discover that the policy is, as we fear, having a damaging effect, they will take action to reverse it.

I would like an assurance from the Minister that such action would be taken should there be any damaging effects. If I receive that assurance, I shall not seek to divide the House.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mrs. Edwina Currie): I recognise the interest and concern of the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) and his colleagues in the community dental service, which we welcome.

[Mrs. Edwina Currie]

Clause 7 amends existing legislation, as the hon. Gentleman has said, to remove the Secretary of State's duty to provide dental inspections and treatment for schoolchildren and replaces it with a power to enable the Secretary of State to provide those services. It also introduces an equivalent provision for Scotland. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman realises, the debate takes place against the background of a dramatic improvement in the nation's dental health, and, in particular, in the dental health of our children.

The discussion document on primary health care set out the need to reconsider the role of the community dental service. Its historical role of providing routine treatment for schoolchildren had once been vital at a time when general dental practitioners were struggling to cope with the demand for their services some 40 years ago in the face of rampant dental disease.

But the responses that we received to the discussion document agreed that emphasis on that role was no longer so appropriate, given the welcome increases over the years in dental manpower and the improvements in our population's dental health. Recent surveys show that the majority of schoolchildren already attend their own dentists for check-ups and the clause is intended to eliminate the undesirable situation where two services are duplicating provision for the same group.

Nevertheless, we see an important continuing role for the community dental service. There are areas, even in those health authorities where general dental practitioners are in good supply, where children are not receiving the best dental care. As we announced in the White Paper "Promoting Better Health", there is a need for increased effort in screening and providing treatment, help and advice in those areas. Therefore, the clause retains the power for inspections and treatments to be carried out where necessary.

4.15 pm

In line with our objective of providing better health, the clause also gives an explicit power to provide dental health education, where the law is rather vague at the moment. We also see a need for the community dental service to monitor the dental health of the general population, not just of children, and to provide services for groups that have difficulty in gaining access to dental care, such as the elderly or the mentally handicapped, who often have considerable difficulties in obtaining the care that they need from their general dental practitioner.

We shall also expect the community dental service to run group prevention and health education programmes for groups of the population, again, other than just for children. There will not be a cut, but we expect to see a major shift of emphasis by the community dental service to reflect the pattern of need in the community now and in the future, not just the pattern of 40 years ago.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Over the years I have repeatedly raised issues that are the concern of the British Dental Association. What is the BDA's attitude to the Government's attitude on this?

Mrs. Currie: I was just coming to that. The British Dental Association has announced that it supports our objectives for the community dental service. It stated its view that they could be achieved without legislative change, but the advice that we have received is that that is not so. If we did not make the change that we have in this clause, we would find ourselves as a Government, on the one hand retaining legislation requiring routine dental inspection and treatment of schoolchildren, and, on the other hand, issuing guidance instructing health authorities to ignore their legal duty by redirecting resources away from that routine treatment of children towards other groups who now have genuine difficulties in gaining access to dental treatment. That dispute with the BDA is a technical one and our discussions with it on this matter have been completely amicable.

Apart from that, we are in close accord with the profession and we shall be discussing with it further the exact terms of guidance to be issued to the health authorities on the future role of the community dental service. I am confident that we shall agree on the outcome of those consultations.

As the hon. Gentleman has said, amendment No. 59 attempts to make it a legal duty that children in opted-out schools be given dental inspections. If the intention was simply to ensure that such children are covered by the general legislation on state schools, I would have complete sympathy with the hon. Gentleman. However, I can reassure him that the Education Reform Bill, which is now going through the other place, is the appropriate vehicle for the discussion of that provision. It already contains a section in schedule 10 which ensures that such schools will continue to be covered. On that basis, the amendment is unnecessary.

I share the views expressed in amendments Nos. 60 and 61 about the need for an annual report and full information. However, an annual report on the state of the nation's dental health is already published in the report of the chief medical officer. The data on dental health analysed by regions are collected every other year and are published in the general household survey. I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman, who is the spokesman on health matters for the Social and Liberal Democratic party, receives a copy of both, but they are in the Library and always have been.

The fact that we collect and publish that information in the way that I have described demonstrates that we agree with him. I can assure him that we use the data in precisely the way that he has prescribed and I am sure that that will meet with his approval.

Mr. Fearn: Having received an assurance that it will still be monitored and that children in deprived areas will fall into a routine, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 8

CHARGES FOR DENTAL APPLIANCES AND TREATMENT

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I beg to move amendment No. 10, in page 7, line 7, leave out clause 8.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following: Amendment No. 62, in page 7, line 13, after 'descriptions', insert

'provided that the manner of recovery shall not include the withholding of dentures or dental appliances from the person for whom they were prescribed'.

Amendment No. 63, in page 8, line 17, after 'descriptions', insert

'provided that the manner of recovery shall not include the withholding of dentures or dental appliances from the person for whom they were prescribed'.

Amendment No. 12, in page 9, line 13, leave out subsection (7).

Government amendment No. 38.

Mr. Cook: The amendment seeks to remove the most offensive clause in the Bill, relating to charges for dental examinations.

Routine dental examinations have been free since the inception of the National Health Service 40 years ago. Clause 8 will mean that National Health Service dentists will become a shade more expensive than solicitors, who, in general, give their advice free.

I appreciate that hon. Members on both sides of the House find the clause offensive. I am modestly encouraged by the press, who have promised me that there will be a revolt of some 20 Conservative Members at the conclusion of the debate. [AN HON. MEMBER: "Where are they?"] Let us not be partisan. We are seeking grappling irons to throw across the Chamber to Conservative Back Benchers.

Yesterday, we had a revolt of only 10 Conservative Members. The press has promised me that matters will be even better than tonight on Monday, when from 10 last night to 20 tonight, we can hope that the number will be 40. That is a pleasing geometric progression that I hope will be borne out.

My only surprise is that apparently the Secretary of State does not intend to join us in our Lobby tonight. On the same day as the Secretary of State's Department produced the Bill, it also produced a White Paper which recorded:

"the Government attaches great importance to the promotion of good health and the prevention of ill-health."

The clause, which provides charges for routine screening, is in flat conflict with that stated commitment to the prevention of ill-health.

It is now four months since the White Paper and the Bill were published. The first question that the Secretary of State has to answer is where in Britain we can find any organisation committed to dental health that supports the proposal and that during the past four months in which the proposals were under debate has been convinced by the Government's argument. If the Secretary of State has to admit—as I suspect he will—that those four months have failed to convince a single organisation of the merits of the proposals, I have to put it to him that the sensible and courageous course would be to pack in and forget this lonely and friendless measure.

There are two reasons why the clause has failed to win friends. First, routine dental examination has to be the basis of any preventive approach to dental health. That statement is so obvious that it does not require elaboration. It is safe to say that all hon. Members have lost their milk teeth. We know that the earlier caries can be detected, the less amount of tooth needs to be destroyed for filling and the less chance there is of teeth being removed.

It is worth stressing and elaborating the extent to which dental examination is important screening, not only for dental health but for general health. My hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) had a tumour removed from his mouth following referral after a routine dental examination in which it was discovered by the dentist. In some cases, such a referral can be life-saving.

It is worth recording that dental and oral cancer is now almost as common as cancer of the cervix. Last night, the House properly and fully debated arrangements for routine screening for cancer of the cervix. Treasury Ministers know that we have our differences with the Government's record on that matter, but at least the Government have admitted the need for systematic screening for cancer of the cervix.

It would be perverse if, the very next day, the House were to pass a proposal that threatens one of the most effective means of screening for a form of cancer almost as common as cancer of the cervix. Indeed, free dental examinations are possibly the most effective way of screening for oral cancer. A study by the Bristol dental hospital discovered that there were more referrals for oral cancer to the hospital from dentists than from GPs and that the referrals from dentists were at an earlier stage in the cancer. That is a vital point, with which my hon. Friend agrees. With his experience, he is well placed to guide the House.

It is vital that oral cancer is detected at an early stage, because the opportunity for surgical intervention in the mouth is limited by its character. The only chance of success in operations is if the operation comes at an early stage.

Other systematic diseases can be detected by dental examination. Mouth ulcers can indicate the onset of severe diseases such as Crohn's disease or now, tragically, AIDS. I find it odd that we should be placing an impediment on routine health screening, thereby losing one opportunity, however limited, for the early detection of AIDS.

There can be no doubt about the importance of the dental examination. I assume that the Secretary of State will agree. He would be in some difficulty in favouring a preventive approach to health care if he did not support the importance of the dental examination. The Secretary of State has an invidious task to discharge in maintaining that he accepts the importance of the dental examination, but that he can introduce a charge on that examination without discouraging people to attend for it.

That brings me to the second reason why the clause is so friendless. The proposition is such patent nonsense that it cannot seriously be submitted that we can introduce a new charge for dental examination without it affecting the people who attend for that examination.

Some patients will find it difficult to afford the fee. The exemptions from charge for dental charges are much more limited than the exemptions for prescription charges. People on incomes just above the poverty line will find that they are liable for the full charge of £3 for a dental examination.

It is ironic and troubling that the people who will be affected are the same people who, in the past fortnight, have been affected by the cuts in housing benefit. Yesterday, during the debate on social security changes, I referred to constituents on an income of £72 a week who had lost £11 a week in housing benefit. I am advised that it is unlikely that that couple will qualify for exemption from dental charges. They will have to pay for any future routine dental examinations, and it is obvious that £3 will be a significant deterrent to those on a diminished income from coming for a routine examination.

[Mr. Cook]

Other patients may be able to afford a dental examination, but simply will not see the sense in paying for it. If they do not feel that there is anything wrong with their teeth, they will not see the importance of having an examination.

I am surprised that I need to point that out to a Government who are so infatuated with market economics. The Secretary of State came to office with something of a reputation as a pioneer of enterprise capitalism, pushing forward the frontier of the market. The Secretary of State will know that one cannot believe in a market unless one accepts that the pricing mechanism works. In other words, an increase in price must lead to a reduction in demand. Nobody with the Secretary of State's faith in the market can really expect us to believe that he thinks that he can increase the charge for dental examinations from zero to £3 without a very serious reduction in demand.

Nor is it necessary for us to reason that proposition only from abstract economic theory; we can prove it from the empirical evidence of history. During the past eight years the Government have persistently increased the charges for routine dental treatment. Yesterday, I noted that comparisons of the record with the last Labour Government were very popular with this Government. Let me remind them of one particular comparison.

In 1979 the maximum charge for routine dental treatment under the Labour Government was £5. The similar charge in 1988 is £115. After this Bill, the charge will be £150. That is an increase of 3,000 per cent., somewhat in advance of the rate of inflation. In the course of those nine years, the biggest leap came in 1985. In that year, the maximum charge for routine dental treatment leapt from £14·50 to £115.

It is instructive to note what happened to the demand for treatment in the subsequent year. The number of fillings completed in the subsequent year was down by 5 million, the number of root treatments was down by 140,000 and the number of treatments for gum disease was down by 1 million. Those figures went down not because the incidence of gum disease and caries went down but because fewer people presented themselves to the dentist because they were deterred by the charge. The only treatment that increased in that year was the number of extractions, for which the charge is relatively cheap. In other words, patients lost teeth that previously would have been saved.

4.30 pm

If the increase in 1985 had that effect, we can expect with confidence that an increase from zero to £3 will also result in a reduction in the demand for dental examinations. That reduction can also be numbered in millions.

What is to be achieved by that lost opportunity and those lost teeth? It is to achieve a revenue saving from this proposal of £50 million. This is not a Government who are strapped for the odd bob or two. We saw only last month just how well financed the Government are. They do not need to sell the principle of free preventive screening for such a paltry price. They do not need to put at risk the dental and oral health of those who will be put off from coming forward because of the charge. Perhaps most importantly, the House does not need to let them do it. Together we can stop them.

Opposition Members are accustomed to voting against the Government. We have had quite a bit of practice since the general election. All we require in order to stop this piece of friendless nonsense is for Government Back Benchers, who know it is wrong and that it will adversely affect the dental and oral health of their constituents, to join us in the Lobby.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): It is really a very simple question: do we want to encourage people to have more dental examinations or do we want them to be discouraged from having dental examinations? It is as simple as that.

When I asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his hon. Friends in debate whether they believed that imposing charges would make it more or less likely that patients would offer themselves for examination, not surprisingly, I did not receive any convincing answer because they knew as well as I do that when a charge is imposed it will make it less probable, not more probable, that people will offer themselves for examination.

The second question is, is it desirable that people should offer themselves for examination? The answer to that is equally clearly yes. It is desirable in the interests not only of dental health but of early treatment for other diseases that become apparent only when there is a proper dental examination. Moreover, it is an examination that general practitioners, despite their very extensive training, are not trained to undertake. That is why I shall vote for the amendment to remove the clause.

Mr. Fearn: I wish to speak to amendments Nos. 62 and 63, which make it clear that the manner of recovery of charges shall not include the withholding of dentures from patients who need them. That would be a cruel and unusual punishment for poverty. We do not like any of the new charges anyway and we shall be voting against them in any Division tonight. It is particularly distasteful that the Government seek to impose a charge for dental inspections, which will militate against the maintenance of the good dental health of the population.

Working on the assumption that we shall not overthrow the Government's majority in the cause of civilised behaviour on this occasion, as has been the case so often lately, it would at least be a gesture for the Government to concede that they do not need a power to withhold dentures from a patient who needs them until he or she has scraped together enough money to pay the charges.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I have a great deal of sympathy for those who argue that phasing out free dental examination is not the right step to be taking at this time. However, I ask those who are thinking of joining the Opposition in the Lobby to reflect on the discussions that have been taking place in the dental profession for some months about the need for a new system of remuneration for dental practitioners. I dwelt on that point at length on Second Reading.

If all the diseases that a dentist looks for when undertaking an examination are as important and far-reaching as has been made out, the question we should be addressing is what contractual relationship a dentist should have with his patient. Clearly, the present

remuneration system that rewards a dentist, regardless of who pays the charge, with a paltry sum of £3·90 for an examination is ludicrously inadequate.

There is another reason why that is so. In the past, when the dental rates study group has considered what fees to apportion to the various items of treatment that dentists carry out, the examination fee has always received little additional money. The reason is that dentists would be adequately remunerated through the treatment that was necessary. Thankfully, in this day and age, we see improving dental health. It is improving to such an extent that patients who have the good sense to go to their dentist regularly need little, if any, treatment. I can tell the House that many practitioners are increasingly finding that, after a routine examination, their patients require no treatment.

That is why the General Dental Service committee has proposed to the Department the need for a new annual registration contract. That contract would replace the present dental examination and screening arrangements. I warmly commend that scheme to the House. The argument should not be about what charge there should be per dental examination and who should pay it, but about what structure of remuneration we require.

There is not time in this debate to go into that aspect more deeply. However, can I tell my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that I support what the Government have in mind. I can also tell him that I have lobbied for the contract throughout the dental profession and there is great support for it from many forward-thinking dental practitioners. I am disappointed that formal discussions on the new contract have not yet commenced. I believe that we should pursue the new contract arrangement, which the White Paper sets out, with all urgency, so that if, as I believe will be the case, the House votes to phase out a free dental examination, there could be an opportunity for us to phase out the free examination and introduce the new annual registration contract at the same time. That would send a clear signal to the public that regular attendance is what the Government want to see and to encourage.

On Second Reading, I made reference to a study that was being carried out on the subject of "Barriers to the receipt of dental care". That study—a very small one, based on just over 100 families—has now been completed and it indicates precisely those points which discourage attendance that I outlined to the House some four months ago. In particular, it shows that many people, despite the fact that they would be entitled to free examination and even free treatment on exemption if they went to the dentist now, do not attend because there is no perceived need to see a dentist.

The second thing which the White Paper stresses, and which during the Second Reading debate my hon. Friend the Minister of State said that he would take urgent action upon, is the need to launch a dental awareness campaign. I understand that discussions are already well advanced on a new scheme to be launched in the west midlands later this year. We must pursue that with real vigour.

I say again to the House what I said on Second Reading —that, if the money which the Government raise from the phasing out of free examination is used to encourage more people to visit the dentist and to help dentists to establish bigger and better practice premises, this measure will indeed be worth while.

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): There is a kernel of reason in what the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) has been saying. However, accepting that the reduction in the number of treatments required is leading to a potential reduction in the dentist's income, I find it scarcely conceivable that the present system will be improved by bringing in a charge that will discourage people from visiting a dentist at all.

There are many irritating shortcomings in this Bill, and one or two glaring faults. This is one of the latter, for several reasons. I think that it is generally accepted as a principle of preventive medicine that all those at risk of the condition that we are trying to prevent should be encouraged to take advantage of the screening and treatment facilities that will prevent it. We know that dental health is improving in our young people in this country, and I am glad of that. I am sure that the Government will not have the cheek to claim credit for it, although they may well do so, but I do not think that many people outside their own ranks would believe them.

The improvement is due to many factors: to a general improvement in hygiene, changes in diet, the addition of fluoride to water and better screening in schools. It is gratifying that nowadays we have classes of children in secondary schools where one would be hard put to it to find a mouth with the fillings and extractions that were common 25 years ago when I was at school. Now, the broad smiles that we can give owe much more to the care of the dentist than to our own care of our teeth.

It is a principle that people should not be denied access to dental facilities, and it is not for the benefit of dental health alone. As my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) has so rightly said, there are many other conditions involved which dentists, by reason of their long professional training, are qualified to pick up. Oral cancer is certainly the most serious of these. It is a hideous condition, almost always involving major surgery on the mouth and throat if there is to be any chance of survival, and still carrying a very low long-term survival rate, and that with a gross handicap.

It is not only a matter of oral cancer. The dentist can pick up a pre-cancerous lesion in the mouth, called leucoplakia, which is commonly associated with pipe smoking and irritation in the mouth. The Minister is nodding. Fortunately I do not have it. Leucoplakia is a condition which can be detected early and the patient can be advised as to its seriousness, and with the removal of the irritant stimulus it can be treated or reversed. Screening therefore offers us the chance not only to detect a cancer that will require major treatment to alleviate but to detect the pre-cancerous state and therefore prevent all the discomfort that that state could bring, and possibly death.

There are many other serious conditions that may be manifested through symptoms and signs in the oral cavity, including the very common one of anaemia, which may well be picked up, and some serious kinds as well as the common iron deficiency type. So it surely is a basic principle that we should be encouraging people to take advantage of the excellent screening facilities which are available in this country rather than trying to discourage them.

4.45 pm

I said that there was a kernel of truth in what the hon. Member for Ryedale said. In the present situation, in which dentists are increasingly finding that the work that

[Dr. Lewis Moonie]

they are doing in order to maintain their income is becoming more and more complicated and difficult to find, there is certainly a case for reviewing the way in which they are remunerated. Perhaps it should be changed to the way in which general medical practitioners are remunerated, with a capitation fee.

We have heard very little about the possibility of actively encouraging people to take advantage of dental screening. It tends to be opportunistic. If a person goes into a dental surgery that person is likely to be called up again at regular intervals, and that is a good thing, but there is no primary call-up system. Perhaps we should be looking at something like that.

It is possible for us to achieve a society in which we perhaps approach perfect dental health at very little additional cost compared with what we are now spending. That should be our ideal and our aim. Alas, this clause does nothing to improve dental health. It will discourage those most in need of the advice and treatment that a dentist can give them to stay away. For that reason, all hon. Members should join us in opposing it.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) speaks with authority and I believe that he makes a powerful case.

The White Paper, which has been mentioned on several occasions, refers at paragraph 1.15 to a number of the measures which the Government propose to introduce, including

"a new contract for dentists which will encourage prevention and promote the quality of treatment provided".

In chapter 4 of the White Paper a more detailed explanation is given as to how that is to be achieved. But in paragraph 2·13 of the White Paper we read:

"As a result of improvements in the nation's dental health greater emphasis is now being given to regular dental examinations, preventive treatment and advice and proportionately less to interventive dentistry. Dental examinations are an increasing proportion of dentists' work."

It then goes on to say:

"The Government believes that it is reasonable for patients to contribute towards the cost of this part of the dental services"

and, of course, that is what subsection (7) of the clause does.

I am sure that there is no dispute about the value of the dental check-up. Members will have received abundant evidence from the dental professional organisations and possibly from individual dentists. The issues were discussed in detail at the Committee stage of the Bill. A check-up detects diseases, including oral cancer. It enables there to be a general check on the general state of oral and dental health of the patient, with an opportunity to halt decay at an early stage and for the dentist, or possibly the hygienist, if he has one, to give advice to the patient on general dental care. It must be right to encourage people to have dental check-ups.

In Committee and in letters to hon. Members the Minister of State has set out the exemptions to charges. He has also explained the proposed charges and how they will fit into the general context of the revised scale of charges for treatment. I accept that he has an argument, but the nub of the case is surely the fear which has already been voiced—whether the imposition of charges will deter people from having check-ups.

In Committee the Minister of State indicated that he was not persuaded that it would do so. We simply have to draw on our knowledge of human nature. I imagine that most of us go regularly to our dentists. I venture to bet that we do not go for a check-up with great enthusiasm and that if we can find a good reason for putting it off for a week or so, we do so. Surely the knowledge that we are likely to be charged for a check-up will hardly encourage us to go. If that applies to hon. Members, how much more will it apply to those who rarely go to the dentist but should, and indeed to some people who have never been at all? Surely there can be few more effective deterrents to them than to know that a charge will be imposed for a check-up.

The White Paper speaks of a new contract for dentists which will encourage prevention. Here the Government are proposing a new contract for patients which will discourage prevention. It is not irrational that those with reasonable means should pay a proportion of the cost of the dental work which needs to be carried out, but the hurdle that we have to surmount in improving the nation's dental health is to get people to be checked in the first place. Here we are proposing to make that hurdle higher.

No doubt my right hon. Friend will argue that the charge will raise money. So it will. But sooner or later the National Health Service will have to meet at least part of the cost of treatment or serious dental troubles which could have been dealt with much sooner and more cheaply if the patient had not been discouraged from having a dental check-up.

There are many very good provisions in the Bill, but it is marred by this proposal and the proposal which we shall discuss later in regard to eye tests. As I read it, the effect of amendment No. 10, which has been proposed by the Opposition Front Bench, would be to remove clause 8 completely from the Bill. That I am not minded to do because I approve of aspects of it. If amendment No. 12, which would delete subsection (7) referring specifically to charges, is put to the vote I will need a great deal of persuading not to support it.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): Having listened to the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) and other Tory Members, I am sure that many of them are sincere in their opposition to clause 8. While I welcome their opposition, I believe that their views are limited and that they are naive about what the Government are attempting to achieve through the clause.

We discussed clause 4 at 1 o'clock this morning, when many Tory Members who oppose clause 8 were probably drinking their Horlicks or were in bed. Clauses 4, 8 and 10 are all about delivering a fundamentally different system of health care. That must be understood. These clauses are not piecemeal provisions, but are part and parcel of a clear Government plan to bring to an end a fundamental principle which has underpinned the National Health Service since its inception in the 1940s—the right of people to free health care when they need it, regardless of their ability to pay.

These clauses should be considered alongside the funding crisis in the Health National Service, which is recognised everywhere in society with the exception of 10 Downing street. My central point is that the crisis is contrived and deliberate. It is geared to creating conditions in which people will accept the need for wholesale changes of the kind envisaged in clauses 8 and 10. Clearly, the

Government wish to introduce a market system of health care. Hence the introduction of the charges proposed in clauses 8 and 10.

How has the crisis been contrived? First and foremost, the National Health Service workload has been increased by the Government's economic and social policies, which have vastly increased unemployment and poverty. This week we are all aware of the real difficulties that people are facing. Government policy has exacerbated housing problems and brought about massive increases in homelessness. The problems have a knock-on effect, resulting in earlier illnesses and deaths, which create more demands on the National Health Service. Numerous studies prove the point conclusively. I shall draw attention to just one. A recent study published by Professor John Fox of the City university showed that unemployed men and their wives have mortality rates 20 per cent. higher than those of people in work.

The second issue that has helped create a crisis is the constant obsession of the Tory party with reorganising the management of the National Health Service. The then Sir Keith Joseph, when he was the Member for Leeds, North-East, introduced area health authorities in the 1970s. Subsequently, his successor replaced them by district health authorities. Then we had the management nonsense introduced by the Griffiths structure which caused the problems in my health authority which I outlined early this morning.

Thirdly, as part of the contrived crisis, we have had the deliberate stimulation of private practice by the Government. The Government argue that private practice brings extra resources to the NHS. The truth is completely the opposite. The doctors who staff and run the commercial medical facilities are by and large the same people who are the consultants within the National Health Service. If they are not working in the National Health Service, NHS waiting lists will increase. The knock-on effect is that people see the need to pay to go privately and to queue jump to bribe a consultant so that they may have earlier access to treatment.

Government policy has deliberately set out to create a public expectation of having to pay. The clause follows on from the creation of that public expectation. The Government have created a public belief that we cannot afford a National Health Service. I reject that. The proof that the crisis has been contrived came in the Budget. The Budget proved that we could afford to pay for the National Health Service and that we could afford to fund the £2 billion cumulative under-spending by the Government. What did the Government choose to do? Did they choose to invest more in the NHS? No; they gave the money to people who already have plenty.

Clause 8 paves the way for the wholesale introduction of payment for health care. It is part and parcel of the destruction of the National Health Service, on which the Government are intent. It is part and parcel of the Prime Minister's attempt to eradicate Socialism. The Government may succeed in getting clauses 8 and 10 through, but they will never succeed in destroying people's strongly held belief that a Socialist approach to health care is the only approach that makes sense.

5 pm

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): I do not subscribe at all to the concluding remarks of the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). To suggest that the National Health Service should be equated with Socialism would make Beveridge turn in his grave, as he is doubtless doing now, but I want to appeal briefly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to my right hon. Friend to reconsider this measure.

I do not believe for a moment that my right hon. Friend is hell-bent on destroying the National Health Service. That is manifestly absurd. I believe that, together with his ministerial colleagues and the Prime Minister, he is right to look at the whole structure of the National Health Service and perhaps consider whether those who have benefited the most from the recent Budget should pay more. All these things should be open for examination. There are no sacred cows. When a review is undertaken, it should be done thoroughly. But the proposed review has not yet taken place. We are considering this afternoon the issues of prevention of disease and the plight of those who are least able to help themselves and to afford the necessary care. Whenever there is a doubt, the benefit should be given to the less well-off. I also happen to believe in the old adage that prevention is a hundred times better than cure. It is also a lot cheaper in the short run and in the long run.

There is nothing to be ashamed of for any Minister to say "Yes, we will reconsider. We have got that particular thing wrong." It is a brave and courageous man who is able to change his mind. I hope very much that my right hon. Friend will announce this afternoon that there has been a change of mind, because I see nothing to be gained either for the nation's health or for the Government's health by persisting with this wrong-headed proposal.

Every remark that I make now could equally be applied when we discuss eye tests. I shall not seek to catch your eye then, Sir, because all these observations apply to both issues. I very much hope that when we vote the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) will not seek a Division on the amendment that would delete the whole clause, because quite a number of us could not go with him, but if he seeks a Division on amendment No. 12 I shall be in the Lobby with him, unless my right hon. Friend concedes totally. I hope and believe that many of my hon. Friends, who take as much pride as I do in the contribution that the Conservative party has made over the years to the National Health Service, will be with me too.

Mr. Robin Cook: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am always happy to seek consensus in the House, and I am happy to give an undertaking that we shall not needlessly divide the House twice. At the conclusion of the debate I shall endeavour to withdraw amendment No. 10 and to divide on amendment No. 12.

Mr. Cormack: That is a most helpful intervention and I am very glad that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman.

In conclusion, I shall amplify a point that I made a moment ago. We on this side of the House have much to be proud of in the National Health Service, as do Members in all political parties. It is a National Health Service which successive Governments since the war have developed from the blueprint of a great Liberal. We acknowledge that; we all should. There is no attempt by this Government to destroy what has been created, which is one of the things of which we in Britain have most cause to be proud in the 20th century. That it needs reviewing is beyond dispute; that there are problems within the Health

[Mr. Cormack]

Service no one can question; but until a review is complete and we have decided what shape the Health Service should take in the 21st century we have a duty in the House today not to impose extra burdens or to deter. If we do not deal with this clause we shall impose extra burdens where they should not be imposed, and we shall deter people from helping to safeguard their own health, and the country's economy in the process.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I cannot agree with the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) when he says that the Government's review of the National Health Service should not be a matter of great concern to us. I believe that the review is likely to lead to Government proposals to privatise much of the NHS. But I certainly agree with the bulk of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. I, too, take the view that anything that makes people more reluctant to go to the dentist is wrong. There has been a welcome increase in dental treatment and dental health altogether in the past few years.

I have some figures that I received from the Library, which I believe are correct. Whereas in 1976 there were about 26 million courses of dental treatment, 10 years later there were 32 million, although there is an indication of slight decline in the past 12 to 18 months in the numbers receiving dental treatment. That may be due to dental charges. Nevertheless, that substantial improvement in the numbers receiving dental treatment is surely much to be welcomed. I see that the Secretary of State nods his head in agreement.

Certainly, for those on limited incomes who will not be exempted from the charges, there will be greater reluctance to go to the dentist. Not everybody is over the moon about going to the dentist, as the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) said earlier. Not everyone considers that the treat of the year. Therefore, it is pretty obvious that people who do not go regularly to the dentist would find it difficult financially in many cases, although not all, to meet the charges. They may find an added reason and incentive not to go.

The Secretary of State may well argue that £3 is a modest enough sum. It is not modest enough, however, for many people on limited incomes with family responsibilities. I am concerned that the charge of £3, if it goes into the Act and is not objected to strongly enough today in the Division, will be greater in 12 or 18 months' time. It is quite likely that any increase will be well beyond the rate of inflation. That has happened to prescription charges and several other health charges.

The Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. John Moore): Perhaps I can assist the House with facts, because the hon. Gentleman is a friend of mine. He might like to look at clause 8(4) where he will see the degree to which costs are contained and controlled.

Mr. Winnick: I understand that the Secretary of State is in some political difficulties—I am not being malicious—and if he says he is a friend of mine, although we are friends, I must say that being a friend of mine may not help the right hon. Gentleman in his current political troubles. If I say that I wish him well, I am sure he will take that in the spirit it is given.

It is all very well to say that the sum is set out in the regulations, but the Secretary of State knows very well that the Government could bring in amending legislation, which would increase the sum well beyond the rate of inflation.

Mr. Robin Cook: Before matters proceed and my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) gives too many concessions to the Secretary of State, I should say that clause 8(4) provides that regulations shall be made, but does not specify what may be in those regulations. As I understand it, the Government are proposing a charge of £3 on the basis that that would be 75 per cent. of the present cost of a dental examination. But nothing in the Bill prevents them from uprating that percentage to 100 per cent. and making a £4 charge.

Mr. Winnick: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is perfectly clear, going by what happened to prescription charges and their level when we left office, and now, which my hon. Friend remarked on when he moved the clause, that this Government are determined to put up health charges substantially, way beyond the rate of inflation. Therefore, we cannot be confident—no one can be—that in two or three years' time, and certainly before the end of this Parliament, the sum will not be £4 or higher.

I am one of those people who do go for check-ups every six months. I have been going to the dentist regularly since my late twenties and if I have any regret it is that I did not have regular check-ups at an earlier age. If my teeth are not perfect, and they are not, they are certainly far better than they would have been if I had not gone for six-monthly check-ups in the past 25 years or so. As that has helped me, I want to encourage as many other people to recognise the necessity of dental check-ups.

It gives me much pleasure, understandably, when on a six-monthly visit the dentist gives me the marvellous news that I do not need further treatment. I am over the moon because, although I always have an injection, I do not look forward to the treatment. As I am convinced that six-monthly check-ups have meant that my teeth are in a much better state of health than they would otherwise have been, I want to encourage as many people as I can to have them.

It worries me that a substantial number of people—they may well be in a minority—do not recognise the necessity of six or even 12-monthly check-ups. To the extent that this measure makes people more reluctant to go to the dentist, it is a retrogressive step. It should be objected to strongly and the measure should be dropped from the Bill.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): I support the Government because this is a modest clause which will encourage people to value their Health Service.

Last year when the Government originally suggested dental charges for examination and treatment people wrote to me saying, "We were not aware that check-ups were free because every time we go to our dentist he charges us." It came as a surprise that a check-up was free and that it was the treatment that they were paying for. Therefore, we must first bear in mind that people have not been deterred from having a check-up because they were under the impression, as I was until I came to the House, that they paid for it.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Bennett: No. I should like to develop my speech.

The logic of the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) is that we should not have any charges whatever. If we are to charge for treatment, it does not seem logical to object to charging for check-ups. If charges deter people, there should be no charges, yet——

Mr. Cormack *rose*——

Mr. Michael Carttiss (Great Yarmouth) *rose*——

Mr. Bennett: No, I shall not give way. The logic is there and my hon. Friends must follow it through. If charges deter people, hon. Members should be opposed to any charges, but I have not heard that put forward by anybody and I do not believe that that is the case.

The small sums involved, and they are small, must be considered in terms of the relative values people place on other things.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Bennett: No. I want to be brief and give my hon. Friends a chance to speak.

A charge of £3 is equal to two packets of cigarettes; it would not fill an average family motor car to drive more than 50 miles; and it is less than most people pay to buy a meal for one in a Chinese takeaway. Yet Opposition Members hypothesise that £3 is such a large sum that it will deter people from having a check-up.

Mrs. Peacock: It is to some people.

Mr. Bennett: The exemptions in the Bill for people on income support and those under the age of 19 deal with my hon. Friend's point. For the average person in work £3 is not a lot of money. Anyone who sees what people spend every day of the week in a supermarket, and what people spend in public houses and on holidays, and who considers that 60 per cent. of the population have a video recorder, yet believes that £3 for a check-up every six months will deter, is not living in the same world as my constituents and me.

An important principle is that those who can should pay towards their health care. The problem with our Health Service in the past 40 years has been that, because it is free at the point of contact, people do not value their health or the Health Service. If we had small charges—I would go as far as to say that we should have charges for visits to the doctor for those who can afford it—it would make people value the Health Service and health care, and it would ensure that our doctors and dentists were more orientated towards the customer.

If anything puts people off going to the dentist, it is not charges, but the times when dentists are open and our natural fear of dental treatment. I do not believe that £3 will deter people from visiting their dentist and I welcome this modest sum which will help people appreciate that their health is worth paying for.

5.15 pm

Mrs. Rosie Barnes (Greenwich): I wish to make my stand on this issue clear. I have done so in the past and it must be repeated until the word is finally heard.

We are debating the principle that the NHS should be free at the point of use. There is no logic in having an NHS which provides free check-ups for some parts of the anatomy but not for others. We must ask ourselves whether this is an organ-by-organ charging system. If it is teeth and eyes now, what is next on the agenda? What is the logic in charging for check-ups for eyes and teeth but not for other organs? As far as I can see, none.

It has been clearly demonstrated that charging for check-ups acts as a disincentive for people to go for essential tests. The poorer members of our society, for whom a few pounds is the cost of their children's meals for the next couple of days, are far less likely to spend the money on these tests if the alternative is basics, such as food.

It is clear that tests on eyes and teeth prevent diseases. Many diseases are detected which a patient has no knowledge that he is carrying. It is fallacious to say that patients or their general practitioners can make good the gaps that charging for these tests will create. In particular, eye diseases—like other hon. Members I will not seek to be called again because the principle is the same for both eyes and teeth—such as glaucoma, which has no symptoms until it is irretrievable, will cause more blindness if the measure is passed.

We should seek increased, not reduced, screening. If we believe in primary health care, some facilities which are at present available only in the private sector, such as Well Woman screening offered by BUPA, should be considered for the NHS. It makes sense for health, so it makes sense for human beings. It also makes sense in cost terms, because early detection not only means that diseases are cheaper and easier to treat, but that people are not off work for months on end. Moreover, deaths can be prevented, so families are not thrown on to the resources of the state for their future maintenance.

To start charging for check-ups and examinations is completely at odds with the commitment to increase primary health care. It will deny people access to the first inroad to primary health care.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): First, I should like to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), on the courteous and skilful way in which they moved and piloted the Bill through its Committee stage.

In my view, for what it is worth, the Health and Medicines Bill is an excellent piece of legislation. It is all about preventive medicine, screening, encouraging people to go to the doctor and about doctors screening those people who are most vulnerable——

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: But.

Mr. Hayes: My hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) has taken the word out of my mouth—but why do we have to have a measure that many Conservative Members believe will be a positive deterrent to people visiting their dentists? All of us who have contact with dentists will know that dentists can diagnose over 120 different diseases of the oral cavity, including cancer, leukaemia and AIDS. We know that this country, like many countries in the Western world, will be faced in the near future with what might be described—I do not exaggerate—as an epidemic of the AIDS virus. If the proposal goes through, it will be a positive deterrent for the diagnosis of that disease.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke made a courageous speech defending the proposal. I commend

[Mr. Hayes]

him for so doing, although I do not agree with him. He put to the House the simple proposition that, if people can afford to pay for treatment, they should do so. I agree with that. I believe in the free market. For what it is worth, I believe that if people go to the dentist and the dentist tells them that they require a certain treatment, they should pay for it if they can afford to do so. The same applies with the optometrist and the optician, but let us get people into the dentist's surgery in the first place. We all know how difficult it is to persuade people to go to the dentist. *[Interruption.]* I have heard my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State intervening from a sedentary position and will be happy to give way to her if she wishes —*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend says that there is nothing that she wants to give me. [AN HON. MEMBER: "My hon. Friend is the lucky man."] I know that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State is a strong believer in preventive medicine, but I am not sure whose day she has made.

I advise my hon. Friends, and especially my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke, that the evidence is overwhelming in relation to what has happened when charges have been imposed. With your leave, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall give the figures.

In 1981, a report of the British Dental Association made it quite clear—*[Interruption.]* If the Under-Secretary of State keeps fluttering her eyelids at me, it is not surprising that I have lost my place. In 1971-72, when there was an increase in charges, the number of courses of treatment decreased by 7 per cent. In 1977-78, they decreased by 4 per cent. and they decreased by 4 per cent. again in 1984-85. My right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench will say, "Just a moment, the volume of treatments as a generality decreased." In fact, the number of courses of treatment decreased. In my respectful submission, that is particularly significant.

In 1987, 2,600 oral cancers were discovered, many by dentists. Many doctors do not receive training in oral anatomy. They do not have that skill or understanding. I am sure that many Opposition Members who are members of the medical profession will accept that view, and I have received several letters from doctors accepting it. I challenge anyone to dispute it with facts and figures. By and large, doctors will not be able to diagnose the cancer until too late.

Many of my hon. Friends will know, and many members of the medical profession will understand, that there is a high mortality rate with oral cancers. Therefore, it is vital that they are diagnosed early. Dentists have the opportunity of screening millions of people who, by and large, are well. Many people visit a doctor only when they feel ill. By that time, it may well be too late. A moment ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) said that that would cost the Health Service a great deal of money in the long term.

I do not want to go into the Opposition Lobby against the Government. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State laughs at that. I believe that the Government and my right hon. Friend genuinely believe and care about the Health Service and do not want to dismantle it. His record and that of the Government are second to none. However, we would be foolish to deny that there are problems and to add to those problems by ruining a perfectly laudable piece of legislation by slapping on people a charge that would positively deter them from being treated.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): If the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) wanders around a dentist's surgery with as much agility as he wanders around the Chamber when he is delivering speeches, it will be difficult for his dentist to get near him to administer any treatment. Nevertheless, I agree with him. He and a number of his hon. Friends are quite right—prevention is better than cure. The best way of preventing dental disease must be to ensure that people attend their dentists and have any problems diagnosed.

It was distressing to listen to the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) a moment ago. We are used to him being wheeled in to defend the indefensible. If he goes on like this, he could well end up as a Parliamentary Private Secretary. I last heard him defend the Government on the School Boards (Scotland) Bill, which is a long way from Pembroke. However, here he is again. He said that it is right that people should be required to pay for their basic treatment. I suppose that it is just about as logical as saying that there should be a poll tax, and I suppose that he supports that. Perhaps he will suggest that his constituents should have to pay for corresponding with him or for going to his constituency surgery. That may be an appealing thought——

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I never thought of that.

Mr. Home Robertson: Well, the hon. Gentleman has got the idea now.

I should like to preface my remarks by saying something nice about the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security——

Mrs. Currie: No.

Mr. Home Robertson: The hon. Lady says "No", but I shall say it anyway. She had a signal achievement some months ago when she persuaded the Government to ban the manufacture or sale in this country of oral tobacco products, such as Skoal Bandits. Having taken a private Members' Bill through the House to ban the sale of such products to youngsters, I am delighted that the Government have achieved that. The hon. Lady did that because she recognised the serious danger of that type of product to oral health. I wonder how on earth she can square that action with the matter that we are debating today. On the one hand, the Government are taking dramatic interventionist action to prevent trade in that kind of poison, but on the other hand they are introducing a charge that will deter people from attending their dentist to have regular examinations to prevent precisely the same diseases from spreading in this country.

I agree with hon. Members on both sides of the House that it is important that we protect this principle, in order to try and improve dental health. Nowhere is it more desperately needed than in the country which I help to represent, Scotland. As my hon. Friends the Members for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) and for Livingston (Mr. Cook) will know, dental health in Scotland is about the worst in the whole world, for a whole range of reasons: because of people's diet, because of their lifestyles and because they do not attend the dentist's surgery as often as they should.

It would be relevant to put on record some reference to a report that was laid before the Government by the

Scottish Health Service Planning Council—a Government body. I am referring to the SHARPEN—Scottish Health Authorities Review of Priorities for the Eighties and Nineties—report, which was submitted to Ministers last year. It says, among other things:

"While the oral health of the Scottish population has improved progressively over recent years it is still considerably worse than it might be and throughout the whole community compares unfavourably with England and Wales."

Quoting from memory, I understand that over one third of our population in Scotland have none of their own teeth. Perhaps the Minister can confirm that abysmal figure. The situation in our country is dreadful and action is needed to do something about it.

5.30 pm

If I may quote again from the report, it says:

"The regular take-up of dental services should be encouraged by every possible means".

How on earth will that be achieved by this measure?

The final paragraph of this section of the report says:

"The proportion of the costs of dental treatment met directly by patients should not increase disproportionately. Nor should they reach a level which discourages regular routine dental care. In the general dental service clinical examination and advice including advice on prevention, diet and oral hygiene should continue to be available to all patients free of charge."

That is what the Scottish Health Service Planning Council told the Scottish Office last year. It was a specific recommendation aimed at dealing with a serious problem which affects far too many of our people in Scotland. We are beginning to make some headway in improving dental health in Scotland. Why on earth are the Government now suggesting, for a paltry financial gain, that we put all that at risk?

The Minister's hon. Friends are right in the warnings that they are giving him about this. I go further than the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack). I sincerely hope that there is not a Division on this. There appears to be a clear consensus tonight that the Government have made a mistake. Everyone can see that, and there would be no shame in the Minister's withdrawing this part of the Bill at this stage. The whole House could then go forward constructively.

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): Governments, like individuals, are always faced with the question of deciding priorities, accepting costs in the seeking of advantages. When we debated this subject in Committee I started with the point of view of my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes). I listened carefully to the response of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health when he explained the purpose of the proposal. That is something that has not been picked up in this debate. The Minister pointed out that this was not, as the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) said just now, for a small increase in Government finances: every penny of the money that is raised from these inspection charges and the inspection charges which are to be discussed later will be added to an even larger sum of over £500 million, to be used solely and entirely for improvements in primary health care in the National Health Service. That is the key.

I do not agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett), who suggests that a £3 charge is not a deterrent. It is to some and, in a working-class constituency like mine, it will undoubtedly deter some people. But it will not be a deterrent to those who do not have to pay, to those who already attend their dentist privately, to those who do not go to the dentist at all or to those who can comfortably afford to pay the charge. A small number of people will find it a burden. I know that and I would not be able to support the Government on this part of the clause, as I told my hon. Friend the Minister in Committee, unless I was given the absolute assurance that the money so raised would be devoted to something more useful.

I disagree with the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) who said that there was something wrong with a system of priorities—I think that she called it an organ-by-organ approach. There is a case for such a system. I do not believe that the National Health Service is to spend £50 million on keeping free dental checks for that very small group of people who will be deterred, because it is such a small group and because there are other things that are so much more important. We would all have our own list of priorities.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Individuals do not count?

Mr. Griffiths: I do not agree with the comment that individuals do not count, which I hear from the Opposition Front Bench. I am suggesting that each one of us would have his own list of priorities. But I am persuaded, after listening to the Minister's assurance, that the best way ahead would be to allow the Government to use this Bill as a vehicle for the general improvement of primary health care—and one of the costs of that will be this part of this clause. I do not welcome it, but I accept it and shall support the Government in the Lobby.

Mr. Dalyell: May I ask the Secretary of State a factual but pertinent question against this background? I am probably the only hon. Member on the Opposition Benches who has experience of the Department of Health, albeit as a lowly parliamentary private secretary to Dick Crossman from 1968 to 1970. If I recall events of 20 years ago, it is simply to ask whether the practice has changed. I well remember that time and in those days, if any proposal was put forward, there would certainly be discussions with Sir Alan Marre, or whoever was the permanent secretary, and the officials. But absolutely crucially important was the view of Sir George Godber, as he then was, and Dr. Henry Yellowlees—but particularly Sir George Godber as chief medical officer.

I understand perfectly well that the House of Commons cannot reasonably ask to be told what civil servants have said to their Ministers, but I think the House is entitled to ask the rather different question: what has the chief medical officer, in his professional capacity, said about any proposal for a change such as this, to levy charges for dental examinations? I ask in general terms, therefore, what is the view of the chief medical officer of this proposal and, in particular terms, whether he has expressed a view on whether dentists will come to rely not so much on their clinical judgment as on their perception of the depth of their patients' pockets?

There is a real human problem here. Dentists are decent people but they are also realistic people. Very often they will make decisions out of kindness which will mean that a patient whom they think cannot easily afford treatment

[Mr. Dalyell]

will not have to pay out the £150—the argument against which was deployed by my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook).

My question, however, concerns the precise advice that has been received from the chief medical officer and his colleagues. After all, we have here a Department that has turned down the technical advice of its own committee on AIDS. The Department's committee was overturned. Has the chief medical officer, by any chance, been overturned on this matter? Parliament at least has the right to know what the chief medical officer has said about this proposal.

Mr. Cartiss: There was a certain amount of levity earlier, which was particularly provoked by my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes). This is quite the most miserable and petty idea that the Government have introduced. My feeling about my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench is that they tend not to be sufficiently Right-wing in their policies. On this issue, they have made a grave mistake. I very much hope that there is still time to reconsider the proposal to introduce charges for dental check-ups.

I respect the views expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett). I believe that he speaks for a number of my colleagues—no doubt this will be a continuing debate—when he says that he would like charges to be introduced for other checks. This proposal should not be allowed to go through without expressions of concern from those who, in every other respect, support and welcome the way in which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is promoting sound policies, ensuring a mammoth investment in the Health Service. If we fail to express our concern about the impact of these charges for the sake of this tiny sum of money, my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke and other hon. Friends, for perfectly sound and logical reasons, given their outlook, may be putting forward next year and the year after charges for other examinations.

I do not take the view that, for five years after a general election, a manifesto must be regarded as being written on tablets of stone. On a number of occasions my hon. Friends on the Front Bench have been able to persuade me to enter the Lobby enthusiastically because, although I may have had reservations about some aspects of what they were doing, it was in the manifesto.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) argued that this is a sound proposal because it will make available a complete package that will improve primary health care. If that was such a good idea when my right hon. Friend suggested it in the autumn of 1987, it was a jolly good idea in May 1987, when it could have been included in our manifesto and put forward. I have no concerns or anxieties about the social security system. We passed the Social Security Act 1986 and had the election in June 1987. If this proposal was such an important and vital feature of the Conservative party's approach to primary health care it should have been in the manifesto and we should have knocked on doors saying "This is what we shall do."

5.45 pm

As times change, Governments must respond and come up with different proposals that were not in their manifesto. Every party has done so, and it is an inevitable part of a five-year parliamentary system. If this proposal were coming forward two or three years into this Parliament, I would say that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had decided, after examining all the issues, that this was the right thing to do. I cannot understand how it suddenly emerged as a crucial feature of the Conservative party's approach to primary health care in October or November when we did not say in May or June to the voters that this is what we wanted to do.

On that basis alone I am unable to support the Government on this proposal. Most reluctantly, I shall join Opposition Members in the Lobby because on this issue they are right. One of the problems with the Government is their unwillingness to recognise the force of argument and the concern that exists. That has been my profound view over the five years that I have sat in this Chamber. I have sat silent, with enthusiasm for some measures and not so much enthusiasm for others. We are talking about peanuts in a massive programme of investment for the Health Service.

I can do no better than conclude my remarks by observing, please think again. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, who did not flutter her eyes at me but left the Chamber, are doing a first-class job. Conservatives throughout the country and many people who do not support our party are proud of what they are doing, despite all the media hype about problems in the Health Service. Why spoil that for this piddling, miserable proposal? I should want to say the same—I probably will not be able to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker—about the eye test charges.

I can do no better than echo the words of the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes), who identified, as did other hon. Members in Committee, a range of matters that can be highlighted by dental tests. My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North said that he knows that some people will be deterred and will find it a burden. If that is so—I believe it to be so—no hon. Member can possibly fail to support the amendment.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): My main reason for speaking in the debate stems from the remarks of the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths). One of the most interesting issues that emerged from the speeches of the hon. Members for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop), for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) and for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss)—the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth made a particularly courageous speech, and I commend him for it—was the support they all gave to the need for preventive dental measures. Prevention has received a general welcome and an encouraging degree of cross-party support. Prevention should not become a party political issue; it is too important to be dragged down into the Punch and Judy antics of party politics.

But the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North has sold his support far too cheaply. He seemed to be saying that he has allowed himself to be persuaded by the Government because they have said that money realised by charges will be translated into other preventive sectors. That is not a good argument, because the cost-effectiveness of charging £3 for a check-up is open to serious question. If the immediate saving is £50 million, the total cost, in the fullness of time, to the Government in picking up the cost of subsequent dental treatment, even though they are only

partially funding it, will still be far more than £50 million. For that reason, if for no other, the argument that swayed the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North is false. I hope that he will reconsider his position. The position he adopted earlier prior to being persuaded by the Secretary of State was sounder.

The subject before the House is important. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) has agreed to shift the focus of his attack to amendment No. 12 this evening—it goes more to the heart of the argument.

I wish also to pick up something said by my constituent, the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), whose interests I always seek to advance in the House. He made an important point that applies to Scotland, where particular problems arise for people on the margins of benefits and low income earners, who will be most affected by the proposal. It will have a very severe impact, especially in the central industrial belt in Scotland. The traditionally bad diet and unhealthy lifestyles in that area are responsible for some of the problems that manifest themselves in the relatively poor statistics on bad dental health north of the border. So this argument is apposite to Scotland.

The point made by the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) was also important. If we allow the Government to introduce this change, what element of the Health Service will be next on the agenda for charges? That is a worrying feature of the charges. A point that had not occurred to me before listening to this debate was the likelihood that these charges will in future be treated by the Treasury just like any others. If extra revenue has to be raised from the health budget in future, the Treasury will not differentiate between money that has been allocated for improvements in preventive medicine and other general revenue, and the charges for the check-ups will spiral in the same way as general charges have in the past. That is inevitable, and it is another reason why the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North should reconsider his view unless the Secretary of State gives us a guarantee that that will not happen.

The increase to £3 is a serious one to some of my constituents and will certainly deter a significant proportion of those who visit the dentist. It is a good idea to encourage people to go to the dentist——

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you inform us about the practice of passing notes to right hon. and hon. Members on the Front Bench? The odd discreet note is to be welcomed, but there is a flow of paper. I realise that the Secretary of State and his Ministers may not be fully conversant with their briefs, but would you tell us what the practice normally is?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I see nothing out of order; it is perfectly normal practice.

Mr. Kirkwood: In any case, I was about to end my remarks.

Far from moving in the direction of imposing charges for dental check-ups, there is an economic case for giving people a positive financial incentive of, say, £3 to have their teeth checked once every six months or so. On a cost-benefit analysis, I believe that would pay dividends in the long run, and would show that the Government have got this aspect of the Bill very wrong.

Of course we can argue about whether people who can afford to pay should make a contribution to other, more general medical treatment, but as Conservative Members in this debate have eloquently said, there is no case for making this insignificant saving, which will make significant and damaging inroads into what we are all trying to establish—a future system of health care which is properly funded and which will encourage people to engage in preventive medicine rather than waiting until treatment is necessary, by which time important dental symptoms and oral conditions may have been missed and cannot consequently be treated properly.

This proposal to introduce a charge is a retrograde step, and I hope that Conservative Members will not only make speeches against the Government but will encourage their colleagues to follow them into the Lobby against the Government and in support of the amendment.

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I have been most impressed by some of the speeches by Conservative Members tonight—in particular, that by the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims), who made a reasoned and considered speech about prevention, in which I know he takes an interest. It is difficult for me to add much to what he said, so I shall make only two brief points about what is involved here.

I hope that the Minister will not start talking about who first introduced charges to the National Health Service. We had an agreement in Committee not to do that any more. I admit that I did it first, but I have kept to the agreement since then. An important principle is involved: the difference between charging for treatment and charging for a screening process. Now, for the first time ever, we are going to charge for screening.

I hope, too, that the Minister will not say that we need to target screening and that it is no use having blanket screening. If he has a brief saying that, he should put it aside, for two reasons. Targeting is not applicable in this case. Dental disease occurs at all ages, and unless one identifies a specific disease—that is not the case here—targeting screening is not relevant to the dental examination.

I reinforce the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) about other diseases, particularly cancer of the mouth. He mentioned the study from Bristol. The important point about that is that the diagnoses were made earlier. That is the important thing about going to the dentist. People go to a general practitioner because of some major problem, but a higher proportion of cases in the Bristol study were picked up at stage one, rather than stages three or four, as is common at a general practitioner's. That is the important point about having the screening test, in which diseases are picked up. It is no good saying that patients have other symptoms and diseases that will take them to the doctor. They often think they have a dental problem and go to the dentist first. If that is prevented by a charge, there will be a delay in the diagnosis.

Finally, the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) seemed to say that £3 was not much—merely the price of driving a car a certain distance. I do not think he realises how much it is to many people who do not pay charges. Even I did not realise how much it meant to many people until I became a Member of Parliament. Many of us lead

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slightly closeted, ivory-tower, academic lives, but to a large number of our constituents £3 is a lot of money, and it will act as a disincentive to treatment.

I end by congratulating the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) on what he said. It would not be a sign of weakness to concede this matter, but rather a sign of strength. As the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) said, one of the problems of this Government is that they produce Bills which they regard as being written on tablets of stone and seem to regard it as a sign of virility to change nothing in Committee. That is a sad reflection on our democracy, and, as the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South said, it would be a sign of strength to reconsider this matter. If the Government do not, I hope that as many hon. Members as possible will join in the Lobby tonight.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I hope that it will not be necessary to divide the House on this issue. It is clear from the strength of argument of all parties that there is a consensus. The arguments propounded by the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) reflected the view of the public when he spoke of these measures as being seen as penny-pinching and petty. He echoed the views of the public and of the professions who are most directly involved in dentistry and optical work. They have argued strongly that these parts of the Bill should be withdrawn to enable them to continue with their vital work.

A basic principle is at stake in the amendments. All of us have grown up to see the National Health Service providing equality of access to a service of equal standards. This measure means that a tax is imposed on access to dental treatment, and later on access to optical tests. The Secretary of State may well raise the question of exemptions. The issue is not the people who will be exempted from these charges; it is the people living on the margins of poverty. The £3 charge can mean a difference for many poor families. They see that amount as a way of saving something for school meals and clothing for their youngsters, and this measure will prevent them from taking the opportunity of a free dental examination. That will have many knock-on effects.

6 pm

This group of poor families is the most vulnerable. People who live on the margins of poverty often skimp on what we may regard as basic essentials, such as toothpaste, but they do not see them as essentials. The diet of people living on the margins of poverty can be badly affected by their income. They are the people whom the Secretary of State should ensure has access to free dental examinations. They must be considered, and I therefore hope that the Secretary of State will concede these points.

After the Health and Medicines Bill was published I spoke to many of the dentists in my constituency. There was a sense of outrage and they spoke at length about the various diseases that can be detected by a simple dental examination. During the week in which I spoke to those dentists, one dentist had diagnosed a throat cancer in an early dental examination. That is a significant point. The Government argue that more emphasis must be placed on primary health care and preventive medicine, but these charges will prevent people having access to that.

As the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) said, if the Government concede this point, it will be seen as a strength. It will do a great deal to restore public confidence in where the NHS is going and in the Government's attitudes. It will do a great deal to boost the morale of the professions. There will be loud applause all round if the Government concede this point. The Government should forget the penny pinching and concede that there are valid, widely accepted arguments against these charges.

Mr. Moore: Amendment No. 38 is a direct response to the activities of the Opposition Front Bench, and I acknowledge the activities of all members of the Committee. In Committee the Opposition tabled an amendment with the same purpose as amendment No. 38, to exempt all 16 and 17-year-olds from all dental charges. For technical reasons we could not accept the Opposition's amendment as drafted, although we undertook to consider it and come forward with an amendment. I am happy to fulfil that undertaking. Amendment No. 38 is effectively identical to the Opposition's amendment except for the technical redrafting. I know that the Opposition would wish me to acknowledge that.

The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) has tabled amendments which are linked. Amendment No. 63 relates to Scotland as opposed to England and Wales. Under the regulations governing the general dental services a dentist has the right not to proceed with or complete a course of treatment where the patient is liable to pay a charge or the full charge has not been paid. Most of us would consider that fair and reasonable. After all, dentists are professional people who must balance their books and run their businessess like anyone else. If they provide a service and have reason to believe that payment may not be forthcoming, they have a right to discontinue the provision of that service.

In practice, dentists often rely on good will and do not insist on full payment in advance or they take an initial part payment and collect the balance on completion. The amendments would force them in some cases where dentures or other appliances are involved to carry through the course of treatment to the end, even when they have every reason to believe that they will not receive the proportion of the fee which is payable by the patient. The dentist can only either write off the loans or go to the trouble or expense of recovery through the courts. The NHS cannot make up the loss in these circumstances.

Amendments Nos. 62 and 63 would create considerable difficulties for dentists and cause unnecessary friction between them and their patients. I do not believe that the amendments would serve a useful purpose. If a patient needs dentures and they have been prescribed, all he has to do to receive them is to pay the appropriate charge if he is not exempt or entitled to help on low-income grounds. I hope that the hon. Member for Southport will not press the amendments.

I should like to respond specifically to the fair point made by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). The White Paper on primary health care was endorsed by the chief medical officer. I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the specific dental charges sections, 2.11, 2.12, 2.13 and 2.14, on promoting health.

Mr. Dalyell: Is it a fact that the Government's proposals have the full and unambiguous approval of the chief medical officer and his advisers?

Mr. Moore: I apologise again for my inability to make a loud noise. The White Paper on primary health care, which unambiguously endorses these points, was endorsed by the chief medical officer.

I shall do what my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) did, and very well, when he sought to put the debate in context. The debate's context is how we try to allocate priorities for more spending on the family practitioner services. We should start with that point because it is an important feature which surrounds the nature of this proposal, the controversiality of which I do not for one moment doubt, having sat throughout this debate on Report, let alone the debate during the past few months.

The family practitioner services have already had an increase in real terms expenditure of about 43 per cent., or £1·5 billion, in the past nine years. I do not think that anyone would disagree with that; it is endorsed by both sides of the House. That amount compares with public expenditure increases in a similar period of 14 per cent. As my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North rightly pointed out, last autumn my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary announced, in the public expenditure proposals, substantial increases in real terms for the period up to 1991. It is within the context of these family practitioner services that we must consider the general dental service. That service has had its gross expenditure increased by 37 per cent. in real terms, with the Government's gross expenditure increasing in the same period by 20 per cent. in real terms. The Government committed £521 million last year.

I have referred to the White Paper on primary health care, "Promoting Better Health", which my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health introduced on 25 November 1987. I read with great interest all the Standing Committee *Hansards*, especially the comments of the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) in support, in a bipartisan way, of many of the aspects of the White Paper. The House will be aware of the Government's ambition, which is shared by many hon. Members on both sides of the House, above and beyond the public expenditure programmes, to spend more on family practitioner services.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) asked us, rightly, to address the question of the extent to which those aims should be financed by maintaining or changing the present balance between public expenditure and charges within the general dental service and beyond the planned public expenditure. It is a legitimate point that any Government in looking at their priorities should consider on top of the already planned proposals for increases. It is crucial, in that context, therefore, to understand what has been happening in dental health and why; then we can understand why the Government believe that their proposals are fully justified.

The view is almost universally held that dental health has been undergoing major improvements. Valid points have been made about variations in Scotland and elsewhere but the pattern for the United Kingdom as a whole has been one of steady improvement over the past few decades—under Governments of all political parties. Let me give one or two examples which are germane to my argument. In 1973, 29 per cent. of five-year-old children were free of dental decay. By 1983—a decade later—the figure was 52 per cent., showing an amazing and very welcome improvement. Let us take a different date for adults. In 1968, 37 per cent. of adults had no natural teeth. By 1985, that figure had gone down to 22 per cent. Both those examples show a clear pattern of improvement, although I accpt that there are considerable regional variations, which I shall go into in a moment.

Let us also consider the courses of treatment given. The number of courses of treatment, for all ages, has risen by 19 per cent. since 1979. However, what is particularly important is that courses of treatment given to those over the age of 65 have risen by 92 per cent. Another critical factor which has not been mentioned so far——

Mr. Robin Cook: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Moore: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would allow me to finish my point first. A further factor illustrating the change in the nature of Britain's dental health is that since 1979 the number of dentists has risen by 20 per cent.

Mr. Cook: In his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) the Secretary of State stressed that the proposals in the White Paper had been specifically approved by the chief medical officer. I wonder whether he could give us some guidance. Since he made that observation, my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) and I have been trying to find the reference in the White Paper to charges for dental examinations. So far we have been unable to find any such reference. Can the Secretary of State guide us as to where we may find it?

Mr. Moore: With pleasure. The hon. Gentleman will find the precise reference on page 9, at paragraph 2.13.

Let me deal with the changing pattern——

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I have sat through the debate, although I have not attempted to take part. Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and perhaps also to the recent intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), could the Secretary of State say where in chapter 4 of the document "Promoting Better Health" that reference is to the chief medical officer having given his full support to charging?

Mr. Moore: I do not think that it is normal practice to include such a reference. The hon. Member for Linlithgow, whose memories go back to the days of the late Richard Crossman, will no doubt know whether that practice has been followed in every White Paper produced by every Government Department. I have specifically answered the question asked by the hon. Member for Linlithgow. We do not include such information when we write White Papers. *[Interruption.]* As I said, the chief medical officer endorsed it; I could not have been more specific.

Let us consider changes in treatments. That is an important subject especially in relation to a factual error earlier in the debate, which I must correct. The number of extractions has fallen by about 13 per cent. over the past decade and the number of fillings by 21 per cent. Both those developments reflect the pattern of improvement in dental health. Meanwhile, the number of crowns fitted has

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risen by 83 per cent. and the number of bridges fitted by 535 per cent. That is a clear indication of the changing pattern.

What are the reasons for the improvement? Clearly, it would be quite improper if those of us who visit dentists did not compliment them on their activities first. But another point that emerged repeatedly in Committee was that half the nation does not visit the dentist regularly—a point referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway). As hon. Members know, many other critical factors are involved in improved dental health. The first is better diet, although the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) referred to Scotland's particular problems in that regard. The reduction in the amount of sugar consumed has been a key factor in the improvement of dental health.

Mr. Cormack: I appreciate the way in which my right hon. Friend is seeking to reply to the debate and I sympathise with him. Would he not agree that inspections may also have played a significant part?

Mr. Moore: I shall be coming to that very point in a few moments, and I appreciate my hon. Friend's genuine sympathy.

I have referred to better diet and reduced sugar consumption. Better information is also a critical feature. There is now better information on dental hygiene, on methods of brushing one's teeth and looking after them, and the information given to children is especially important. A crucial factor that has not been mentioned so far is fluoride. I am talking not just about fluoridation but about fluoride in toothpaste. About 90 per cent. of all toothpaste purchased today contains fluoride and most of us are exposed to fluoride in that way. We have a nation of better-informed people taking better care of themselves.

It is very important that hon. Members on both sides of the House should understand that all these improvements have been happening at a time when the percentage of the general dental service paid for by charges has been increasing. The Opposition have disagreed with that pattern over the past few years. The reality is that in 1978-79 20 per cent. of the overall revenue for the general dental services came from charges. By 1986-87 that figure was 30 per cent. That represents a substantial increase in the proportion paid for by charges rather than by the taxpayer. Nevertheless, throughout that period there has been a significant improvement in dental health.

Let me again put the proposals in context. This year, the proposals, including examination charges as well as the proportional charge increases, would take the percentage of care paid for by charges from 30 per cent. to 32 per cent., thus reducing the taxpayer supplement to the general dental service from 70 per cent. to 68 per cent. This is the basis on which we should view the increased public expenditure proposals for primary health care and the increased proportion that the Government propose should come from charges for the general dental service.

Two key questions have emerged from this afternoon's debate in addition to my remarks about improvements in dental health. The first, which my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) has consistently asked, is "Do we have evidence to suggest that charges will deter?" The second concerns the extent to which we are helping those who cannot afford the present pattern or a changed pattern of charges. But the critical question is that relating to deterrence. I start by reminding hon. Members who have not had the opportunity to read what I found to be an extremely good set of Committee *Hansards* of what my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health said:

> "Unless the deterrent argument can be made to run much faster and further than I believe it can, most of the arguments about the effects on the detection of other forms of ill health fall, because they depend on the proposition that large numbers of people will cease to come forward for examination or treatment."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 9 February 1988, c. 620.]

Let me examine some of the questions about the deterrent effect of charges. They are valid questions because they reflect the worries surrounding this debate. First, I should remind the House that in 1968—I agreed that I would not say who did what when increasing charges for dental services—came the first increase in routine dental treatment charges since charges for dentures were introduced in 1951. Since 1968 a pattern of increases has been established, and sometimes those increases have been major. Against that background, we can study the pattern of courses of treatment. In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) and others, there has been no year since 1968 in which the number of courses of dental treatment has not increased, and I shall deal with both the short-term and the long-term impacts in a moment.

The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) made one or two remarks about changes in the number of fillings. I appreciate that it is sometimes difficult to get the exact facts, but let me tell him those facts of which I am informed. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that after the increase in charges in 1985 the number of fillings fell, though by 6 million and not by 5 million. As a result of improved dental care, however, the figure has been declining for many years. The number of extractions did not rise. The number of extractions has been declining steadily since 1979—a total decline of 13 per cent. from just over 4 million to under 3½ million. Moreover, treatment for gum disease rose by 5 per cent. in the year following the 1985 increases in charges.

The hon. Member for Livingston is right to say that short-term changes occur in the pattern of demand from time to time.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Moore: Let me finish this point and perhaps obviate the need for hon. Members to ask questions and further delay the debate.

Despite some sedentary interruptions, I have tried not to refer to the massive increases in charges of 35 per cent. in 1976 and 27 per cent. in 1977, but even following those increases there was still an increase in take-up of courses of treatment. The pattern of overall increase with occasional short-term interruptions has meant a steady average increase of 2·7 per cent. per year. That is clear from the data that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health and I have available, and nothing that was said in Committee sustains any argument to the contrary.

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): The Minister has talked about the deterrent effect of charging for treatment, but charges for examination are being introduced for the first time. Secondly, does he agree with the British Dental Association and all other independent experts that an

increase in charges is followed by a slowing down in the increase in courses of treatment and the graph never actually catches up to the position that would have been achieved if the rate of increase had not been checked by the steep increase in charges?

Mr. Moore: As I have said, I do not believe that that case is sustained either by the arguments put in Committee or by the data that I have studied.

Mr. Hayes: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right about treatment volumes, but every time charges have risen—in 1971-72, 1972-73, 1977-78, 1978-79, 1984-85 and 1985-86—although treatment volumes have continued to rise, the treatment per course has gone down. That is a British Dental Association statistic. My right hon. Friend will correct me if I am wrong, but I believe that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health accepted that. The argument is about the rate of recovery.

Mr. Moore: Like my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health, I have studied all the data carefully. Although the long-term trend line shows short-term fallbacks, and it would be wrong to ignore market reaction, there are also years in which the increase is greater than the overall trend, producing a sustained increase of about 2·7 per cent. per year. Those who do not accept that argument seem to ignore the fact that that has occurred despite massive increases in charges in some years—as high as 35 per cent. under the Labour Government.

Mr. Galbraith: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Moore: I should like to continue as we are getting short of time.

With regard to the second point made by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), all our experience relates to free examinations and in many ways confirms the weakness of the argument that a modest charge will be a deterrent. Although examinations have been free of charge, only half the nation avails itself of the service. As was properly pointed out in Committee, the variations occur by region and social class and have far more to do with factors other than the theoretical possibility of a charge. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale said, the Tidman and Brown study is extremely relevant in this regard.

I was fascinated to read the 19 March editorial of the *British Dental Journal*, which cited a study entitled, "Barriers to the Receipt of Dental Care". The key point, which is not unfamiliar to most of us as lay people, is fear. The editorial preferred to use the word "anxiety", but it referred to a whole series of factors, beginning as follows:

> "A generalised dislike of going to the dentist . . .
> Fear of pain.
> Fear focused on an aspect of treatment.
> 'Guilt' embarrassment . . .
> The possibility of receiving poor or unnecessary treatment."

Only then does it mention the potential cost. I do not suggest for a moment that cost was not a factor, but for most people it was not the major factor.

Members who did not have the privilege of being on the Standing Committee may not realise that a 75 per cent. charge for examinations on a proportional basis will mean that for some of the more modest treatments the charge with the examination will remain the same or even be lower than at present. I accept that the numbers are modest, but they are still significant for those who avail themselves of regular dental care.

The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden did not wish me to mention this, but I cannot resist pointing out the actual sum involved. It is a very modest amount for those who are not exempt. I do not deny that £3 has value and is difficult for some people to find, but that sum once or twice a year must be compared, as my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) pointed out, with expenditure by the average family of more than £8 per week on alcohol, £4·55 on tobacco, more than £2 per week on toiletries and about £20 per year on toothpaste. Moreover, a large number of people will still be exempt from any charges at all. All the current exemptions will be maintained—for all children under 16, for young people aged 16 and 17, for students under 19, for expectant or nursing mothers and for people on low incomes, not just those on income support and family credit but those just above that level due to the special low-income scheme covering an additional £200,000 on application.

With 38 per cent. of the population exempt, I do not believe that a shift in charges increasing patient contributions to general dental services this year from 30 per cent. to 32 per cent. will deter people from seeking treatment.

Dr. Moonie: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Moore: No, I am trying to conclude my remarks.

We shall continue to protect those who cannot afford the very modest examination charge and we shall release additional resources beyond the increases in public expenditure already agreed. That increase will be spent in primary health care. My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North was particularly concerned about this. The increase will be used especially in dental health to encourage prevention, to increase resources for fluoridation, to improve vocational and postgraduate training for dentists and on a new programme to promote dental awareness, especially among the young. However difficult decisions about priorities may sometimes be for Parliament, I hope that on the basis of what I have said the House will accept the justification for the Government's very solid proposals.

6.30 pm

Mr. Robin Cook: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to respond to the debate. I shall do so briefly, because I appreciate that there comes a time when the House wishes to come to a decision and it can be exceedingly brusque to those who stand in the way at that moment.

We have had an interesting debate. To those sitting on the Opposition Benches it has been revealing to observe the extent to which the Government's Back Benchers are prepared to come out openly in support of this measure. In the course of the debate, eight Conservative Members have spoken. Of those eight, five came out flatly against the proposal for charges on dental examinations. I am rather pained that so many of them had to express such reluctance at joining me in the Division Lobby, but I appreciate, and commend them on, their courage in overcoming that natural distaste.

Of the remaining three Conservative Members, one, if I may say so to the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr.

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Greenway), made a speech of sustained agnosticism, at the end of which I found it difficult to know quite where he stood in relation to charges. But two out of eight—one in four—came down in favour of charges for dental examinations. The hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) had the candour and courage to say that he was, broadly speaking, in favour of charging for just about everything, including visits to general practitioners, and the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) had the intellectual rigour and honesty to say that these charges will act as a deterrent—to a minority, yes, but nevertheless they will act as a deterrent to some people who will be put off from presenting themselves for a dental examination. Those were the friends of the proposal.

The Secretary of State, reasonably and understandably, sought in response to widen the debate to take in a discussion on the state of the nation's dental health. Of course it will be welcome in all quarters of the House that the nation's dental health is in an improved state. There are a number of different variables for that—diet, better standards of dental hygiene, community education in schools, and, most obviously of all, probably the single largest influence, the fluoridation of our water supply.

But the key question is not whether the nation's teeth are in a better state than before; the key question to which we must address ourselves in the debate is whether charges for dental examinations promote or detract from a further improvement in the state of dental health.

The Secretary of State grounded his argument against charges being a deterrent rather heavily on what happened in 1986. The figures that I have for 1986 are markedly different from the figures that the Secretary of State quoted. Mine come from the Dental Estimates Board. Its account for the year from April 1985 to April 1986 shows that the number of fillings did fall, from 33 million to 28 million—a drop of 5 million—and that the number of treatments for gum diseases fell from 2·4 million to 1·5 million—a reduction of well over a third. That was a reduction, but well ahead of trends. In each of the three years in the past 20 years in which there has been a substantial increase in dental charges, there has, in the following year, been a substantial drop in the graph of upward increases in treatment courses. That is what the Secretary of State referred to in his speech as a market reaction.

We can expect a market reaction to charges being brought in for dental examinations, and I for one do not believe that preventive medicine of this important character should be exposed to a market reaction. Yesterday we debated the Government's proposals for cervical cancer screening. Does anybody imagine that we would take seriously a Government who proposed a fee for screening for cervical cancer? Would the hon. Member for Pembroke be prepared to rise in his place to justify such a fee on the basis that he justified these charges—on the ground that it would encourage women to buy the services more? Of course not.

If any Government were benighted enough to propose a charge for cervical cancer smears, that Government would be laughed out of court by the Chamber because everybody, but everybody, would appreciate that such a charge would deter people from coming forward and would flatly contradict the idea of that screening being a preventive process. Precisely the same argument applies to charges for dental examinations.

If we are serious about making that a screening process to encourage the nation to have a healthy set of teeth, we must recognise that that service must be available free and we should not bring in any charges that will deter anybody, even if they are a minority.

On that basis, we wish to move to a vote. I accept the point raised by those who have taken part in the debate, that it would be more appropriate to divide on amendment No. 12 than on amendment No. 10. Therefore, with the leave of the House, I seek to withdraw amendment No. 10, and will move amendment No. 12 formally.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment proposed: No. 12, in page 9, line 13, leave out subsection (7).—*[Mr. Robin Cook.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 206, Noes 287.

Division No. 258] **[6.35 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Patrick
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'hain Hodge H'l)*
Day, Stephen
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Dykes, Hugh
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fry, Peter
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles

Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
Madden, Max
Madel, David
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meacher, Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sims, Roger
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Frank Cook.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John*(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Hal
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion

Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment made: No. 38, in page 9, line 16, at end insert—

'(8) In paragraph 2(4)(a) of Schedule 12 to the National Health Service Act 1977 and paragraph 2(4)(a) of Schedule 11 to the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978 for "16" there shall be substituted "18"'.—*[Mr. Moore.]*

Clause 9

THE DENTAL ESTIMATES BOARD AND THE SCOTTISH DENTAL ESTIMATES BOARD—CHANGE OF NAME AND EXTENSION OF FUNCTIONS

Mrs. Currie: I beg to move amendment No. 39, in page 10, line 5, leave out

'in the exercise of this power'

and insert 'conferring such a right'.

The amendment is consequential on our acceptance of amendments in Committee, and I trust that it will be acceptable to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 10

GENERAL OPHTHALMIC SERVICES AND OPTICAL APPLIANCES

Mr. Robin Cook: I beg to move amendment No. 13, in page 10, line 26, leave out subsections (1) and (2).

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): With this it will be convenient to consider the following: Government amendments Nos. 31 and 33.

Amendment No. 14, in page 12, line 44, leave out subsection (4).

Government amendments Nos. 32 and 34.

Mr. Cook: Amendment No. 13 seeks to remove from the Bill the provisions for charges for the eyesight test. There is a degree of common ground between this debate and the debate that we have just concluded about charges for dental examination. I shall take as read the position on the general principles. *[Interruption.]* I have had occasion to mention that the Tea Rooms in this building are provided for people to gossip and that the Chamber is where we debate important matters. I wonder whether you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would draw that to the attention of hon. Members.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is quite correct. Will hon. Members who wish to make conversation do it elsewhere, and will those who remain in the Chamber allow the hon. Gentleman to move his amendment?

Mr. Cook: I am obliged to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is much common ground between this debate and the one that we have just concluded. I shall take as read the general principles that underlie both debates. The clause provides for another reduction in health services which are free at the time of use. For that reason, it is objectionable. The clause also provides a charge that will discourage people from attending for a screening process. It is being put forward by a Government who proclaim their commitment to preventive medicine. It is impossible to square that paradox.

I shall not rehearse the debate on the general reasons for rejecting the clause. Instead, I shall concentrate on the specific and substantial damage that the measure will cause. First, it is misleading to describe an eyesight test merely as an eyesight test. It involves a full eye examination: an examination of the back of the eye for systemic disease as well as for eyesight. Indeed, the objectives of the examination are laid down in regulations issued by the DHSS. They prescribe the diseases that have to be looked for.

In the previous debate I asked the Secretary of State what evidence had emerged since Second Reading that would support the case that the Government are making for charges. I have to say to the Minister for Health, who I understand is to respond to the debate, that evidence has emerged since Second Reading that is appropriate and relevant to the clause, but it buttresses the powerful case against introducing a charge for such tests.

The first piece of evidence, and perhaps the most powerful, is provided by the survey carried out by the British College of Optometrists. It carried out a survey of 1,500 optometrists in the first week of January this year. That is a massive survey and it covered an enormous sample 70,000 eye examinations. From that survey it emerged that in the five working days of that week 6·1 per cent. of those examined were referred to a general practitioner or hospital for further examination for a medical condition. A total of 2·5 per cent. of examinations resulted in a notification to a general practitioner of a medical condition which the optometrists believed should be reported. In other words, 8·6 per cent. of the sample revealed some sort of medical condition, not immediately related to eyesight, that was worthy of further medical investigation.

To put that figure into perspective we should bear in mind that 12 million eye examinations take place each

year. If 8·6 per cent. of those examinations require referral, that means that over 1 million people are referred to their doctor or hospital for a further medical investigation as a result of the routine screening.

Some of the medical conditions discovered during eye examinations are serious. The two most common to emerge in the survey were cataracts and glaucoma. Both those conditions can result in total blindness. One can be operated upon and the other can be treated, but both can be irreversible if left untreated for too long. It is an interesting fact that the majority of cases of glaucoma are detected not by GPs but by optometrists using the routine NHS eye examination.

It is perverse to suggest that that screening operation is likely to be done better by GPs who remain free; or who remain free for as long as the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) is content to allow them to do so. It is not the case at present that GPs carry out that screening better than optometrists, and it is not likely to be the case in the future, as, by and large, GPs do not have the same experience as optometrists and are unlikely to have the equipment that is available to optometrists. The examination is vital and can result in the identification of serious medical conditions.

The question that remains is whether the charges in this case will deter people from coming forward for examination and preventive screening. I believe that they will. On this occasion I am happy to say that I have substantial and influential supporters for my contention that charges for eye examination will deter people from coming forward.

First, I should like to pray in aid the Prime Minister. She wrote a letter in June 1980 to an optometrist in London concerning the then proposal by the Government to charge for eye examinations. That proposal was abandoned at the time. The letter stated:

"The Government have decided to drop this proposal in response to strong representations that such a charge in a service that has a preventive function would be wrong in principle and could deter patients from seeking professional advice."

Those are the words of the Prime Minister, the senior Minister of the Government, who now, eight years later, are coming forward with a charge for that very examination.

The question that I have to ask the Minister—I hope that he will be able to answer it—is why did the Prime Minister consider that charges for eye examinations in 1980 would be a deterrent, when in 1988 we are told that they will not be a deterrent?

A suggestion was made by a spokesperson from Downing street which was quoted in the newspaper that revealed the Prime Minister's letter. It said:

"Most people are better off nowadays. If people spend so much on luxuries, surely they can afford £10 for an eye test."

Let us examine that proposition and see whether it convinces us. I believe that the charges in this case will be an even greater deterrent than the charge for dental examinations. They will be a greater deterrent for three reasons. First, such examinations are likely to be more expensive. Optometrists are currently paid £9·30 for every eye examination. If they are to recoup that income in full, they will have to set a charge of about £9 or £10. Therefore, the charge will be substantially greater than that currently proposed for dental examinations.

Secondly, the client group to whom the examination is most relevant is the elderly. As one grows old, one's eyes degenerate. The optometrists survey to which I referred earlier discovered that half of all referrals were people over the age of 60. Yet the exemptions for people who have an income too low to pay are drawn in such a limited fashion that, of the 9 million pensioners in Britain, 6·5 million will not qualify for exemption. Those 6·5 million will have to find the full £10 for the examination, although they may well be the people who have just lost £10 of housing benefit as a result of the changes that we have seen this month.

Thirdly, those who require eye examinations are likely to require them periodically. As one gets older and one's eyes start to fail, one needs to have one's spectacles adjusted regularly. Such people should have their eyes tested regularly to ensure that their spectacles are appropriate for the condition of their eyes. The elderly, who are least likely to be able to afford the £10 charge, are in the invidious position of having to go more often and pay that charge.

Diabetics are another group of people who ought to go regularly for an eye examination. To their credit, officials at the DHSS are seeking to encourage greater screening for diabetic retinopathy. This condition can result in blindness among diabetics. It requires regular examination to ensure that retinopathy is not developing from the diabetic condition. Diabetics are not exempt from the £10 charge. They will have to pay that charge every time they present themselves for examination. There is every reason why every hon. Member would wish a diabetic to attend for a full eye examination as often as possible because with that condition, as with others, sight can be retained by treatment, but that treatment can be successful only if there is an early enough intervention.

7 pm

I stress that the decision whether to go for that examination will inevitably be taken by people who have no idea at the time how important that examination might be to them. Of course, any member of the public, however poor, who believed that the examination could result in his or her sight being saved would scrape together, borrow, find, beg or steal the £10 to pay for that examination, but it will not appear that way to many people. Many of them will not be aware until too late that, by passing up the chance of an examination because they did not want to pay £10, they have seriously jeopardised their eyesight—perhaps worse.

My hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish)—who will seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the course of this debate—has with him the details of a constituent who developed a problem with her eyes, went along for a full eye examination and, as a result, was referred immediately to the local hospital and was treated within days for secondary cancer from breast cancer. She had no idea, as she considered whether she would go for an eye examination, that her life was at risk and would be saved by that examination. Indeed, she has said that she is doubtful whether she would have gone for the examination at that time had she been obliged to pay £10 for it.

How many more people will respond perfectly rationally to the price signal, will not present themselves for an examination and will suffer the tragedy of discovering when they do eventually go for an examination that it is too late for their life or too late for their sight?

There is an irony here, and it is that the Government are expecting individuals to show prudence by investing, and

[Mr. Cook]

investing early, in an eye examination and spending a substantial sum as a preventive health measure. They expect individuals who may not be in a position to make an informed decision to make that prudent investment. Yet the Government themselves are not prepared to show a similar prudence by investing in a free screening facility that is excellent value and of proven quality.

I want to conclude by looking at what good value it is. It is reckoned that the cost of blindness to the state is some £3,500 per person per annum. That figure was last used by Professor Yudkin in the *British Medical Journal*. That is a substantial sum per annum. I hope that my hon. Friends will forgive me if I put a cash figure on such a deep personal tragedy as the loss of sight, with all that that implies for the loss of witness of life and the life that then has to be lived in darkness, but that may be the best way to get through to the Treasury Bench.

Taking the cost of screening as £9·30 per patient, we can calculate that the total cost of screening 1,000 patients would be £9,300. If the survey to which I referred at the beginning of this speech provides an accurate guide—and it was certainly a very comprehensive, large-scale survey—the examination of 1,000 patients would produce 60 patients to be referred to doctors or hospitals for conditions such as glaucoma, cataract and retina——

Mr. Galbraith: Retinopathy.

Mr. Cook: I am most grateful. I knew that my hon. Friend would be a great asset in this debate. I rest on his guidance. Possibly he could check *Hansard* for me when I have concluded my speech.

Of those 60 cases, many of them with serious conditions that threaten blindness, it is far too modest to suspect that one in 10 would have their sight preserved as a result of that referral to medical attention. If only six were saved from going blind as a result of that examination, the annual saving to the state would be £21,000—over double the cost of paying for the screening of the 1,000 patients in the first place. It is a bargain. Only a Government obsessed with counting the petty cash of public expenditure would be prepared to put such a bargain at risk. This is the last chance that the House of Commons has to save the Government from their own folly. Many hon. Gentlemen on the Government Back Benches know that it is folly. It needs only a sufficient number of them to show the vision and courage to join us in saving the Government from their own folly and saving an excellent free Health Service for our constituents.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): It will be no surprise to my hon. and right hon. Friends on the Front Bench that I feel impelled to speak in this debate. Indeed, I have travelled many thousands of miles to do so. I rise particularly to support amendment No. 13.

I can understand the need to find more money for the Health Service, even if it is to be moved to be spent in a different part of the Health Service. There are many needs, and I acknowledge them all and would wish money to be spent. So I can understand the Government's view that they should find more money for the Health Service. But the proposition now before us will cost the Health Service far more that it will save. I can understand the Government's view that primary medical care, on which they are to spend a lot of these dubious savings, as I understand it, and preventive medicine, are of great importance. But clause 10 as it stands will be a powerful instrument against early diagnosis of a number of diseases, and early diagnosis is surely the core of preventive medicine.

I can understand the soundness of the economic theory that people who can afford to pay for medical aids should be asked to do so, but such people are already paying for glasses and other appliances, such as contact lenses, that they may need. We are dealing not with the principle of their paying for something that they need but with whether they should pay for the check to find out whether they need it. It has always been a fundamental concept of the National Health Service that medical examinations must be free. If those examinations indicate that some appliance, such as glasses, contact lenses or dentures, as we were discussing earlier, are necessary for the patient, fair enough; we have conceded that they should be paid for. Most people who originally thought, happily and with misty eyes, looking through rose-coloured spectacles, that we could make health service free have accepted that if appliances are needed they must be paid for. But the argument advanced in the earlier debate by my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) was absolutely shot to pieces by hon. Members on both sides of the House, because if we once say that the principle of free testing for anything is to be breached, what is the reason for stopping anywhere? That is what worries us.

I have no doubt whatsoever that a very substantial number of people will be deterred from having their eyes tested. On the Government's figures, a quarter of pensioners will be eligible for free tests. That leaves three quarters who are not eligible. I have to admit that I have never accepted the theory that every gentleman over 65 or lady over 60 is automatically a pauper; there are some who are very wealthy, but I do not think that three quarters of pensioners fall into the category. Many are on a very difficult line between managing and not managing and for them that £10—and we know that it has to be at least £10—is going to be a very powerful deterrent. And, as the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) said, this comes just at the time when they need to have their eyes examined more often than at any other time in their life. They will find it very difficult to work out where the £10 is to come from out of their budget. After all, 78 per cent. of people between the ages of 78 and 85 have major eye diseases and obviously need to have their eyes tested very regularly. I am worried about those pensioners.

I am also worried about the parents of growing children. The children will be safeguarded, as they should be, but I am talking about the parents themselves. I have read all the debates and nothing I have seen has convinced me that I am wrong when I say that parents will put the needs of their children above paying for their own eye tests. I would have done it myself. We all would, if we were short of money when our children were growing up. A parent will say, "I may not need to have my eyes tested. They may be all right. It will cost £10 and Johnny needs a new winter coat." That is where the money will go. The parents will not go to have their eyes checked and early signs of the onslaught of such things as heart disease, cancer and diabetes will be missed.

It is all right for hon. Members. We are in receipt of a salary and we do not mind paying. We will pay even though we do not like the principle of the free test being

eroded. I am making a plea not for us but for the people who will find it extremely difficult to pay. Because the early signs of some diseases will be missed, the whole operation will cost far more than it will save in the long run because it is much more expensive to treat these things at a later stage.

Nothing I have yet heard convinces me that I am wrong when I warn about the implications of the clause for ophthalmic departments in hospitals. This is serious. A person will go to his doctor and say "I am having headaches." The doctor will tell the patient that his eyes should be tested and that he can go to the high street and pay the optometrist £10 or £11, or he can go to the hospital and have it done for nothing. It stands to reason that people who find it difficult to get the money together will go to the hospital. There is no way that the Government can tell doctors that they are not to send these patients to hospital. That is not on the cards. It cannot be done. People have a right to have their eyes tested in hospital.

Again I come to the point about the extra cost of the proposal. Whereas the Government have been paying optometrists £10 to test a person's eyes, if the person goes to a London hospital it will cost at least £35 for each test. I am using a conservative estimate. Some people have given me higher figures, but at the moment in London the Government pay £10 to the optometrist and will pay £35 at least to the hospital. Outside London the cost is slightly less. As I understand it, it is in excess of £27 or £28. That is the lowest figure I have heard. I am trying to be fair, but that means that we are bound to pay more in the long run.

Again, the most conservative estimate of the current waiting list for care in the eye department of a hospital is nine months. If this goes through, I warn the House that we shall all get shoals of letters from constituents complaining that they have to wait two or three years to have an eye test. Crowding in hospitals has led the people in charge of some hospital eye departments to write to some of us already. Their worries about the extra people who will come to their departments are severe. We should understand this.

I read with interest some of the speeches made in Committee. On 16 February my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health said:

"Regular checks of, for example, blood pressure or urine samples are a far more reliable way of diagnosing the conditions—especially diabetes . . . —than is the occasional eye test. In any event,"—

he said cheerfully—

"people go to their opticians much less frequently, if at all, than they go to their doctors."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 16 February 1988; c. 733.]

I wonder whether that is so. I was interested to see that my right hon. Friend was challenged to produce figures but I did not see any figures.

7.15 pm

If a person goes for an eye test, something positive is done. Many of the people who go to their doctors and who, I am sure, are in the lists of patient attendances may be going simply to have their inoculations updated. That counts as a visit to the doctor. So do a host of other things. Many people need glasses from the time they are children. We all know children who have to wear glasses. Those people have to go regularly to the optician throughout their life. Do they really go more often to the doctor than to the optician? I have tried to remember, and I think that the only time that I have been to my doctor in the last 20 years has been to have a jab, whereas I have been to the optician to have my eyes tested far more often. People who wear glasses for reading or for distance vision have to go regularly to the optician.

My right hon. Friend's statement was mirrored by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security in a most important contribution:

"We would not seek to deny that opticians may detect signs of diabetes or hypertension during the sight test,"—

that is magnanimous because they do it all the time—

"but primary responsibility for the diagnosis and treatment of all medical conditions rests with the patient's GP. The GP has a better opportunity to detect such conditions than the optician has. Doctors normally see about three quarters of the patients on their list within a 12-month period."

I wonder whether those are the same patients or whether some of them have gone along to have jabs, as I did.

It stretches my credulity to impossible lengths to imagine that if someone takes a child with, for example, measles to the doctor there will automatically be a test for diabetes. What doctor takes a urine sample for a wrenched ankle, a broken arm, a tummy upset or flu? There will be many complaints from general practitioners if they have to carry out blood and urine tests on patients in those categories. It is unrealistic to think that doctors would do that.

Later in Committee, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State said:

"We wish to use our funds to encourage GPs to do that kind of screening more effectively in future."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 16 February 1988; c. 751-752.]

The GP should not be asked to do all this screening at the same time as he is dealing with a condition which has nothing to do with eyes. The optometrist, who has trained for three or four years, and sometimes more, is looking at the eyes alone. Because he knows what he is doing he can detect early signs of trouble. The doctor will not do that if he is examining another part of the patient's body.

The idea that doctors should test eyes should be exploded here and now. It is different if the doctor is an ophthalmic medical practitioner, but the ordinary GP knows less about eyes than the trained optometrist. That may come as a shock and surprise to the Government, but it is true. The ordinary GP has not specialised in eyes because he has many other parts of the body to look after. If the Government suggest to the British Medical Association that all GPs should carry out this screening free instead of it being done by optometrists, there will be a loud outcry. Doctors are not trained to do it. If they are going to do the same job as optometrists they will have to train, and to buy a great deal of very expensive equipment. I gather that it costs at least between £3,000 and £4,000. Doctors do not have that equipment in surgeries at present. If a doctor is told that he must test eyes it will be no more practical than the suggeston that charges will have to be made for hospital eye checks. It is not realistic to suggest that.

I resent, on behalf of trained optometrists, the suggestion that they do a really rather unimportant job. They provide us with a cheap and very cost-effective means of doing a very good job on eyes. We should not write them down. After all, only about five years ago, the Government introduced the rule that optometrists should do refractions and give the prescription to the patient, who

[Dame Jill Knight]

could then trot off down the road to a boutique and get some snazzy glasses at reasonable cost. At one stroke, one means of an optician earning money was cut off.

Here we have cut off his other source of income. The Government will say, "We are not stopping him asking for money." But suppose that patients do not turn up or a prescription is taken elsewhere, or, as happens in very many cases, the test does not reveal any need for spectacles? Who will pay then? I think it is unrealistic to say, first, that an optician may or may not get his money from spectacles, and then to say that he may get money from patients, but not from the Government, to do his job of testing eyes.

Clearly, the Government do not want to have late diagnosis of disease when it could be done early. Obviously, the Government do not want to pour out more money on the Health Service, yet get a worse service for it. And surely the Government are not intending to flood hospitals with patients who could be dealt with perfectly well elsewhere, for a great deal less money. I cannot believe that the Government need to place new money worries on people who already have problems making ends meet. Those who need to have regular tests will have problems.

In the previous debate, the hon. Member for Pembroke said that £3 was the cost of a few cigarettes. We are talking about at least £10, so I wonder what new figures we shall hear. But let nobody in the House be in doubt but that people will find it very difficult to pay to have their eyes tested. I do not believe that my right hon. Friends are guilty of all these things: of intending to flood hospitals, or to pour out money only to get a worse service. Nor do I believe that they are trying to place money worries on people. Yet that is exactly what they are doing. All those points will be covered by clause 10, unless it is amended.

I cannot quite understand why this matter has not been thought through, or why difficulties about its implementation have not been foreseen. Should the clause be accepted, we shall have a great deal of trouble on our hands. I shall be first in the Lobby to vote for amendment No. 13 tonight.

Mr. Barry Jones: I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight). The hon. Lady's well-informed speech was supported by considerable experience, and has been of much help to the House in considering this serious matter.

I should like to follow the hon. Lady by drawing to the attention of hon. and right hon. Members a letter that I have received from a consultant physician at Chester royal infirmary. The hospital, just the other side of the Welsh border, cares for many of my constituents. The consultant says:

"While I welcome many of the initiatives, for example, retirement of GPs at the age of 70, I am on the other hand very concerned about the plans for introduction of a charge for an NHS sight test with opticians."

He went on:

"It was reported in *The Times* on 26 November 1987 that charges for dental examinations and sight tests would raise £170 million for 'development of the Health Service' and the 'promotion of better health'. Such a statement is a strange paradox when the major thrust of the White Paper is towards preventive medicine to provide better health care."

He says:

"Eye disease due to diabetes has to be detected before development of symptoms . . . to enable provision of effective treatment. Strenuous efforts are being made to provide such screening and yet the hospital service can only cope with, at best, around 50 per cent. of such patients at risk of losing their vision. Most general practitioners declare that they do not have the necessary expertise to carry out such a task."

That was a central point of the hon. Member for Edgbaston's contribution. The consultant emphasised it strongly. He continued:

"Opticians are therefore ideally placed to carry out this task. It was therefore unfortunate that on the morning of 25 November 1987 I was invited to speak to the local optical committee and received their enthusiastic support for opticians in the area in carrying out screening for diabetic eye disease. Later the very same day such plans were effectively shattered by the proposed introduction of a charge for sight testing."

He goes on to say:

"Hopefully such charges will not be introduced but if this should happen I would like to make a plea for an exemption from a sight testing charge for patients with diabetes. Obviously this will result in other patients with as yet undiagnosed conditions . . . for instance glaucoma and high blood pressure, going undetected with inevitable serious consequences on occasions."

That consultant is not embroiled in the party political scene, but he felt so strongly that he made this case to me by letter, which I have also put to Ministers.

One principle is undeniable. Free sight testing is a cheap and effective method of preventive medicine. If a charge is introduced, I believe that the White Paper's emphasis on preventive health care will be undermined, as other hon. Members have said in relation to dental charges. The Government's stance in the White Paper will be contradicted. The proposed measure will not help any of my constituents.

I say to the Secretary of State and his Ministers that their proposals to put a charge on eye tests is a serious error of judgment. I also advise them that it will damage the Government politically. It puts them in a very unfavourable light at a time when they are struggling on various political fronts. The measure debated today is far from helpful, even in the interests of the long-term life of the Government. It is also morally wrong to put a charge on eye tests a month after massive Budget handouts were given to the richest in our society. This is an unjust proposal and I hope that the Government will think again.

Mr. Sims: In the course of our earlier debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, several of my hon. Friends said that they would not seek to catch your eye in this debate because they felt that the arguments were much the same. I apologise for rising again, but I hope that I shall not be unduly repetitious. Indeed, some of the arguments are much the same, except that in this instance they are rather stronger than those put forward in the case of dental health.

As the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) said, the thrust of the Government's health policy is prevention. Indeed, the White Paper is specifically entitled, "Promoting Better Health", and the third of the Government's six objectives laid out in the foreword to the documents reads:

"to promote health and prevent illness."

The proposals to make charges for dental and eye checks seem incompatible with those admirable aims.

I agree with the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside that the proposals seem politically inept. The controversy that they have aroused has diverted attention from the

many good points in the White Paper and the Bill. It is unfortunate that we have been diverted by those two issues.

7.30 pm

The value of an eye test is not disputed. Anyone who read the material provided to us by the British College of Ophthalmic Opticians (Optometrists) will have learned what is involved in an eye test from the examination of the skin surrounding the eye to the eye surface and the retina. If hon. Members had had the opportunity, as I have, of seeing a detailed examination being carried out by the college, they would have been most impressed, as I was, by its scope and detail and what it can detect. There is ample evidence that a wide range of problems which merit reference to a specialist can be revealed by a test—not only glaucoma and cataract, but symptoms of other problems such as diabetes and hypertension.

As a result of an eye test, it was discovered that a member of my family was suffering from hypertension, which is what you, Mr. Speaker, and I would call high blood pressure. The condition was treated and is under control, but had it not been revealed by the test the consequences might have been serious.

My right hon. Friend the Minister will argue that by withdrawing free tests we are saving money which can be spent elsewhere. I suspect that he will also point out that we are not imposing a charge in the Bill but are simply enabling optometrists to levy one if they wish. Various figures have been suggested; £10 is a popular one. I had my eyes tested only a month or two ago and I spent 30 or 40 minutes with a well-qualified gentleman who used expensive and sophisticated equipment. At the end of the examination I said to him, "Have I had £10-worth?", to which he replied, "You have had about £25-worth," and I believe that he is right.

Whatever the figure, the question is: will such a charge be a deterrent? As I said earlier, any charge, particularly of this sort of magnitude, is bound to deter, especially elderly people on smal incomes—the very people who most need a test.

Would money be saved by this measure? In the short term it would, but in the long term certainly not. The extra cost to the NHS of treating some of the conditions to which I have referred which will have been allowed to develop but which could have been detected earlier by an eye test will be enormous and far greater than for dental matters.

I shall not embarrass the Minister by voicing my assessment of his qualities, but he is wrong on this issue. I shall vote for amendment No. 13 to remove this power from the Bill. It will undoubtedly be said by the media and in the Whips' Office that I have voted against the Government. Perhaps in response I can read a brief quotation:

"Our policies rest on six principles: First, we will give greater emphasis to the prevention of avoidable illness and the promotion of good health—to make the NHS more truly a health service and not merely a sickness service."

My hon. Friends will recognise those words from our party's election manifesto, on which the Minister, I and others fought and won the general election. I supported that policy then, and I shall support it tonight with my vote.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I feel sad about what is happening in this Chamber tonight. The condition of glaucoma appears to be genetically transmitted within my family, so it helps to concentrate my mind on precisely what we are debating here this evening. When my grandmother died it was not from that condition, but it went with her to the grave. I remember well her final years and what it meant in my family, and I cannot understand why the Government wish to press on in this way.

We on the Labour Benches cannot claim any monopoly of compassion and in the context of objectively debating these matters it would be wrong to do so. I cannot understand what thought processes go through Ministers' minds when they conclude that this is in the public interest and, indeed, would safeguard the position of those who may ultimately find that they have this condition.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said to me earlier, this goes against everything that he has ever stood for, and I understand exactly what he means. I sense that many Conservative Members who, recognising that none of us can claim a monopoly of compassion, also wish to say that tonight, but they may feel from a sense of loyalty that they are required to vote with the Government. Yet they are not in the Chamber and will not hear this debate. They will walk into the Lobby and support the Government. The Minister knows the antagonism that the measure is creating and the strong feelings that many of us have and must contain.

Some weeks ago I wrote to the Minister responsible, Lord Skelmersdale. Indeed, I wrote to the Secretary of State the other day and added a footnote in my hand, saying that this was wrong and that he misunderstood what the debate was about. My letter to Lord Skelmersdale included a letter from a consultant at the West Cumberland hospital, and the Minister replied, trying to reassure me and the consultant of the merit of the Government's position. I sent the consultant ophthalmic surgeon, Mr. Cubey, the Minister's letter and Mr. Cubey replied:

"I am writing again so soon because I am sure that you will be interested to know that already within three days of having received your letter enclosing Lord Skelmersdale's views, I am able to refute those views categorically by a concrete example.

I have examined for the first time today a 73 year old man who is a constituent of yours. He had not seen an optician for many years but felt that he should perhaps have some reading glasses and therefore consulted an optician just two weeks ago. The optician found in him signs of early glaucoma of which the patient was totally unaware and which were totally unrelated to his reasons for seeking the optician's help. The optician advised the man's General Practitioner that he should be referred to Hospital, and I saw him at the Workington Infirmary this morning. I confirmed that he has early glaucoma and I have started him on treatment aimed at preserving his sight.

I asked the patient whether, if he had thought that he would have to pay a fee of £10 for his sight test by the optician"—

I presume that that is if he were not going in for glasses—

"he would have been deterred from consulting the optician. His reply was unequivocal. He said that in those circumstances he would not have consulted the optician."

That is an admission that someone would not have consulted an optician because of the charge. The assumption made was that the charge would be £10. I have discussed this with my hon. Friends. Indeed, the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) referred to a completely different figure. We are now talking not about £10 but about £20, £25 or even £30. Does the Minister accept that if such charges are introduced they will act as a disincentive?

[Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours]

The letter continues:

"It is therefore clear that in those circumstances his glaucoma would have gone undetected for a considerable time"—

that is an assumption; it might not be true, but I think that it could be in this context—

"with irretrievable damage to his sight."

That person is a 73-year-old man.

The letter continues:

"I asked the patient if he would agree to me writing to you about the details of his case".

The letter goes on to comment on matters of personal detail and then states:

"I have quoted this case in some detail in order to demonstrate the false assumptions made by Lord Skelmersdale.

It is clear from this case, and this could be multipled many times over in this constituency alone, that Mr. Pitts Crick's fears about the detection of glaucoma are not groundless.

The 'primary purpose of the NHS sight test' may indeed have always been 'to establish if a person needed glasses and if so to what prescription', but an essential purpose of it also is the detection of eye diseases or abnormalities—indeed opticians expose themselves to litigation if they fail to detect these.

It may well be 'that the Government is doing nothing to change the way sight tests are actually conducted', but the proposed restriction of free NHS sight testing will reduce the number of sight tests conducted and hence the number of cases in which for example early glaucoma is detected.

Lord Skelmersdale apparently believes that it 'need not be so' that people would be 'deterred from seeking sight tests on cost grounds'. Here is one clear example of such deterrence. People on low incomes may be deterred by ignorance or by the complexities of having to claim exemption from the sight testing fee.

The recommendations that 'anybody with health worries should in any case consult their family doctor' misses the point altogether, which is that glaucoma, for example, is symptomless until quite advanced, and therefore the sufferer has no cause for concern about it and no indication that he should consult his family doctor until an optician recommends this as a result of his NHS sight test."

A consultant ophthalmic surgeon is telling me that what is being done is wrong and is pointing to the dangers. Surely that must influence ministerial judgment.

I turn to another aspect of the matter. I understand that a court case is going on. I believe that it relates to the British Ophthalmic Lens Manufacturers' and Distributors' Association. I have not done my homework in this area, but I have been informed of it tonight. I understand that it has brought some action, which may be sub judice so I cannot talk about the merits—but perhaps I am wrong—about the right of persons who sell spectacles to sell them without a full eye test. I know that there are shops around the country—I am told that there is one near my constituency in Whitehaven—where a shopkeeper sells spectacles without a formal eye test. It seems that a person enters the shop, looks at a card on the wall and then, based on the identification of certain letters, is able to establish what kind of spectacles are required, and proceeds to purchase them.

7.45 pm

I advise the Minister that persons such as the gentleman to whom Mr. Cubey referred in his letter could enter such a shop—perhaps the Minister could clarify this because I should like to know what the position is——

The Minister for Health (Mr. Tony Newton) *rose*——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Perhaps I could finish the point——and buy his spectacles without having undergone a full eye test, thus slipping through the net for establishing whether glaucoma exists. If that is the case, Ministers must make it clear during tonight's debate.

Mr. Newton: As the hon. Gentleman will realise, I am not aware at the moment of a court case such as he has described, but as he has suggested that there may be such a case, I must obviously choose my words cautiously. I understand that the provisions in the legislation that introduced the voucher scheme were that spectacles can only be provided against a recent prescription, by which is meant a prescription which would entail an eye examination less than two years old.

Mr. Hayes: Perhaps I can assist the hon. Gentleman. I am not aware of any court case but I have been lobbied and know that many hon. Members of all parties have been lobbied by a company whose name I shall not mention, which wants to sell glasses in shops without a proper eye test. I feel that that is dangerous.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I am sure that the Department's officials will follow up what I am saying tonight to find out whether what I have said has any foundation. I was informed of this just one hour ago by the principal optician in West Cumberland who told me of the existence of this retailer. Perhaps there is a case in the European court—it might not be—but he has referred to an action in some court. I am sure that advice is now being taken from civil servants. The matter should be clarified during tonight's debate.

The second issue that I want to raise is the question of what pensioners will do. As I understand it, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) referred to the fact that three quarters of pensioners would not be entitled to the voucher——

Mr. Newton: In view of what the hon. Gentleman has said, it would be sensible for me to clear up the matter straight away. What I had asked for from my officials was what I said on precisely this point in Committee. I repeat it:

"The law is that spectacles can be sold against a prescription that is up to two years old. There is scope for argument about whether two years or some other period is right, but there must obviously be some such provision."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 11 February 1988; c. 660.]

I then repeated the fact that it is not lawfully possible to sell spectacles other than under those provisions.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The firm that gave me the information this evening is Philip Heal of Workington. I am sure that officials will wish to follow that up.

As I was saying, three quarters of pensioners would not necessarily be supported in the payment of the charges. Pensioners are a group of people particularly susceptible to the condition of glaucoma. I should have thought that detection of the condition is very much dependent on their regular visits to opticians to secure a test. If the charge is not to be £10, if it is to be perhaps £15, £20 or £25 because opticians would know that they are not likely to be selling spectacles, and if a hospital is some distance from where elderly people live—as is the case in parts of my constituency—and with their problems with the resources that they retain, they may well visit opticians less frequently to secure that test.

Unless the Minister can give an absolute guarantee to the House tonight that pensioners will secure tests as regularly as they have done in recent years, he has absolutely no right to press the provision on the House because not to give that guarantee is to accept that pensioners will become a more exposed group of people.

Finally, I am sure that the Secretary of State is listening to what I am saying and I advise him that I am not speaking out of any sense of unreasonable criticism of his position. Yesterday he had a very difficult day in the House. We all understand why, and we do not necessarily blame him. These are collective decisions taken by the Cabinet, and he had to sell a brief to the Commons, a very difficult brief indeed to sell. But there comes a time in life when one must realise that what one is doing is not necessarily correct. He knows that in the event that this is pushed to a Division tonight he will win—and he will win because people will vote who have not heard this debate and who may well not have considered this matter in as great a depth as many of us over the past few months, nor corresponded as much with others as some of us have done.

The Secretary of State is in a position not to press this tonight. He is in a position to accept the tenor of the debate, based on the expression of very strong opinions on this subject. In the light of what happened yesterday, I ask him genuinely to reconsider the position. We have but minutes before the Division. Unless he makes some concession, this amendment will not go through. If so, the damage will be done and it will be he who is held responsible. I am sure that he would not wish to carry that responsibility for the rest of his political life.

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): My hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) and for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) have made powerful speeches with which I wholly agree. I wish to add only two brief points.

The first relates to road safety. There has recently been much discussion about bringing daylight saving time in this country into line with that in Europe, and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents has argued powefully that the extension of daylight saving, so that we have lighter evenings, will prevent thousands of accidents on the roads, since many drivers with slightly defective eyesight find it particularly difficult to see at dusk and become accident-prone. In the interests of road safety, we ought to encourage more drivers to take eye tests more regularly, and anything that prevents this is a small step in the wrong direction.

Secondly, it is plain that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services, for whom I have the greatest admiration, needs some money and some excuse to get off the hook on which he has impaled himself. I believe that the European Court of Human Rights has provided us with both an excuse and some additional funds. We have argued in the past year in front of the European Court that value added tax should not be charged on opticians' dispensing fees. We lost that case and, as a result, some £25 million of extra money will be flowing into the Treasury from opticians.

We did not want that decision from the European Court. We can, in practice, set it aside by reducing, even by eliminating, the charges proposed. I hope that my right hon. Friend will take this excuse and change his mind.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): My first duty is to congratulate the hon. Lady the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) on her considered speech, which she delivered with conviction. The House should ponder carefully what she had to say, and the Government should act on her good advice.

In the few brief minutes that I would like to detain the House, I wish to address my remarks to the effect which these changes, particularly the imposition of eye test charges, will have on pensioners. The Federation of Ophthalmic and Dispensing Opticians estimates that over 6 million pensioners will no longer be eligible for free tests under the National Health Service; and, according to its estimates, that is at least two thirds of all pensioners. As the House has already heard, a recent survey of people over 70 in an inner-city area showed that only 50 per cent. had had their sight tested in the previous two years. What we ought to be doing is persuading more pensioners to attend for tests rather than dissuading them because the tests will have to be paid for.

A survey by the British College of Optometrists shows that over half the referrals for treatment or further investigation were in the over-60 age group, particularly for glaucoma, cataracts and certain other conditions. Elderly people are often insufficiently motivated to seek help, and tend to regard deteriorating eyesight as inevitable. So they need particular encouragement and support.

We know that it is the elderly in our society who place the greatest demand on our Health Service. The over-65 age group and particularly now the increasing number of over-75s need more medical treatment proportionately than any other age group. Advances in medicine have enabled people to live longer but we have not really begun to cope with the resulting increase in demand on resources.

Hon. Members on both sides agree that we should treat our elderly people with honour, with respect and with compassion, so that they can enjoy their twilight years without the added burden of worrying about the cost of their health.

The Government will no doubt ask, as did the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) in the earlier debate on dental charges, what is a few pounds for a test? Pensioners have fared badly in recent years, and I would like to give an example. A fairly typical pensioner in my constituency will have modest savings; she will be on a state pension; she will have a heart condition; and she will have failing eyesight. If the hon. Member for Pembroke were present for this part of the debate, I would tell him that she would be insulted if anyone were to say that she touched drink or sullied her lips with a cigarette, and she thinks that videos are luxuries for rich people. So we are talking about ordinary pensioners.

In 1987, the local health authority in the county of Gwynedd, because of pressure on the ambulance service, stopped transporting patients to routine hospital clinics. So my constituent, who lives on her own 20 miles from the district hospital, had to cancel her heart test because she could not afford the taxi fares to attend the local hospital, and there is insufficient public transport in our area. Earlier this month that constituent also lost her entitlement to housing benefit, so immediately became worse off to the tune of £7 per week. If this Bill is enacted, she will budget her income and find that she cannot afford the eye test that she desperately needs.

[Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones]

What the Government must consider is the cumulative effect of these changes in health provision and housing benefit. It is not simply a case of a £10 test for eyes or a £3 test for teeth: it is the cumulative effect, the punishing effect, on their budgets. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House will support me when I ask the Government to reconsider this cumulative effect of their policies on not only my constituents but the constituents of every hon. Member. I have illustrated the reality of living as a pensioner on a tight budget. That is why I and other hon. Members appeal to the Government for a change of heart on this issue.

8 pm

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): I have not yet intervened during the debate, although I did so on Second Reading when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was speaking.

This matter was eloquently raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight). It has caused me and many Conservative Members considerable concern. The case has been well made about the problems of people being deterred from having their eyes tested. I do not want, therefore, to go over that argument again. I shall do what the Secretary of State asked us to do in the previous debate about charges for dental checks—put the proposal in context. First, I shall put it into its financial context.

In the last debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) asked why charges were necessary. We all know why they are necessary—my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench could not get money from the Treasury to make the increases that they wanted in the family practitioner service. The only way in which they could obtain an agreement was to introduce charges. We know the realities of power and how they work, but that does not make it right. If every £1 milllion that were spent would endanger the economic well-being of the country, I could understand that argument, but we know that the reverse is the case. There is amply money to provide for what the Government want to do with the family practitioner service without making these charges.

The great danger is that when the Bill is enacted it will be remembered not for the hundreds of millions of pounds that have been put into the family practitioner service but as the Act that introduced charges for eyes tests. That is the wrong king of epitaph for the Bill.

The second matter that I should like to discuss follows the speech of the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones). There is a danger that the Government have completely misunderstood the problems of many pensioners. I am talking not about pensioners on income support or those who pay income tax, but about the considerable number of pensioners who are in between. That section of our elderly population are being kicked and kicked again at present. They have to pay the extra gas and electricity price increases and the water rates and contribute to their rates. Now they will have to pay £10 to have their eyes tested. That is the context in which this proposal should be judged.

I do not think that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is inhumane, and I have the greatest admiration for him. However, he must realise that this proposal, put in the context that I have just outlined, is a dangerous one, which will do great harm and cause much suffering.

Far from furthering the Government's reputation as a Government who care about the nation's health, the Bill will be seen cynically as the one that introduced charges for people who could not afford to pay for eye tests.

As the proposal does not make much financial sense—it has been generally agreed that its long-term costs are likely to be higher than the short-term savings—and as we are seeking to hit again that section of the community that is the most defenceless, and given the political effect of what the Government have done, they should think again. Unless my right hon. Friend the Minister of State can give some heavy assurances, I shall be joining my hon. Friends in the Opposition Lobby.

Mr. Dalyell: It is my experience that Governments should always be aware of the long-term consequences of what they are doing when their supporters who know most about a particular subject decide to speak out against their decisions.

For many years, some of us have listened to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight), who, if she will forgive me for saying so, has a deep personal interest in this subject and knows much about it. When she makes such a moving and well-informed speech, please let us appeal to Ministers at least to go to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and say, "This is the collective view of a serious House of Commons; can you not do something about it?" I was glad that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury was in the Chamber earlier.

I shall ask one question, as I did in the last debate, on dental charges. I am conscious that perhaps I asked not so much the wrong question as the right question wrongly worded. The Secretary of State treated me courteously and I have no complaints. I asked whether the chief medical officer had endorsed the Government's view on dental charges. Further, I should like to ask a different question. Have Sir Donald Acheson and Dr. I. S. Macdonald, who is the chief medical officer in Scotland, given medical advice on this subject? If so, what was the precise nature of the medical advice that they gave? I see that the Secretary of State is saying something to his right hon. Friend the Minister of State, but the House is entitled to hear the factual medical evidence. This matter is not the same as an argument with civil servants. The chief medical officer, as a technical, professional and independent representative, is surely entitled to have his advice made known to hon. Members who are interested; it is a different matter whether it is accepted.

I want to know what has changed. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) for recollecting some assurances that the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Fowler), the then Secretary of State for Social Services, gave. He said:

"we also believe that the access to a free sight test is important in detecting serious eye disease."—[*Official Report*, 20 December 1983; Vol. 51, c. 295.]

I am entitled to ask what has changed. That former Conservative Secretary of State took the same view as every Labour and Conservative Minister has since 1945, and he made those remarks in Parliament, in public. What precisely has changed to make the Government alter their view? What has Sir Donald Acheson, in his capacity as a doctor and medical adviser, said? The House is entitled to know.

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) is so right. What I, my hon. Friends and my constituents cannot understand is that since 1980 the Government's stated policy from the Dispatch Box has been that it would be completely wrong in principle to abolish or remove exemptions for the free sight test. What has changed? The House should be told.

We all know that all that has changed are the bilateral negotiations between the DHSS and the Treasury. Normally I would not wish to intrude on private grief, but this is not private grief, because 6·5 million pensioners will have to pay. Those pensioners are not on income support, and they will not be assisted. We know that pensioners and elderly people must have their eyes tested regularly, because their eyes are changing all the time.

What about diabetics and people with glaucoma? Diabetes is the largest single cause of blindness in people of working age in the United Kingdom, yet we know that 70 per cent. of that blindness could be prevented if only —this is the key—it is diagnosed early. The same applies to glaucoma sufferers. Glaucoma, as the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) movingly told us, causes blindness and death among many. Sixty per cent. of that blindness and suffering could be prevented. The Health and Medicines Bill is a watershed in primary health care, but what are we doing? The answer is the very thing that will act as a deterrent to primary health care and deter people from going to their optometrists and opticians.

This is not only a stupid decision; it is a wrong one. Will any of my hon. Friends support the Government tonight? Will anyone stand up and say that this is a marvellous idea and endorse it wholeheartedly, going through the Division Lobby with a spring in his step? Of course they will not, because they know in their heart of hearts what the reality is. The electorate forgive the Government quite a bit. They forgive us for messing around with their taxes, their jobs and even their rates, but if we start messing about with their health and their eyesight, there will not be much forgiveness for the Government.

I urge my right hon. Friend to think carefully about this decision. Those of my hon. Friends and I who will vote against the proposal will not defeat the Government tonight, but I sincerely hope that we shall give a clear sign elsewhere.

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): During my brief time in the House few issues have seemed to transcend political differences. There are ideological differences about the market, but this is not a discussion about the market—it is about the rights and wrongs of a specific proposal and the impact it will have on millions of people throughout the country, regardless of how they vote. More importantly, it will have an impact on their health.

This charge goes to the heart of preventive health care. Many eloquent speeches by Conservative Members this evening have identified the principles at stake and shown clearly that, if there is a necessity to save money, it will be swamped by the needs for health care provision of people who will not receive this excellent service from opticians when they need it and before certain diseases develop to the point at which much greater and costlier health care is required.

Already this week specific cases have been used—especially yesterday in the social security debate—to highlight what are often distressing practical points. Today, my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) referred to a letter that I had received from one of my constituents. When we deal with subjects that are sensitive and emotional, two or three lines from a letter will often more adequately sum up a case than endless speeches from either Government or Opposition Members.

The letter comes from a Mrs. Celia Ralph, who lives in my constituency:

"Dear Mr. McLeish,

I would like my name to be added to those who are opposing charges being made for eye tests.

I count myself very fortunate that I can, in fact, write this letter to you to-day. In mid-July '87 my eyesight changed dramatically. My own doctor could pick up no change in the eye, and he then was going off for a two week holiday. Being quite concerned, and not knowing where to go next, I consulted my optician, who realised that something was terribly wrong. Next day I saw a specialist at the Victoria hospital who diagnosed secondary tumours from breast cancer on both eyes. This is seemingly quite a rare occurrence and all of my doctors at the Western General in Edinburgh had nothing but praise for my optician. I've had radio-therapy and chemo-therapy since, which fortunately has stopped the growth meantime.

The question to be asked is, would I have gone to my optician so quickly, if at all, if I had to find £10 for the examination. My visit to him saved not only my eyesight, but my life."

8.15 pm

Many hon. Members on both sides have said tonight that this is a matter of right and wrong, and few issues come down to that. I earnestly appeal to the Minister to take this matter seriously. It is not an ideological issue that we can kick back and forth. This Chamber is a combative forum, and we use it as such to best advantage, but this is a night for quiet reflection on a serious issue. A consensus has emerged from the debate and I sincerely hope that it will be reflected in the Lobbies.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): This is the first occasion in my short time in the House on which I have found myself seriously at odds with the Government. My late father-in-law, who had regular eye checks, either as a result of an accident or of incompetence, did not have glaucoma diagnosed early enough to save the sight of one eye. He was a conscientious man who would probably not have been deterred by the charges from having tests, although he was on a low income, but I fear that, as other hon. Members have said, hundreds or thousands of people in our constituencies would be deterred.

I wish to quote from a letter from a constituent who has been a strong supporter of our party for many years. Many people in our constituencies and elsewhere have worked hard for our party for many years, but are appalled by this measure. She says:

"but for regular eye tests my husband's glaucoma would not have been discovered in its early stages. He had no cause to suspect that anything was wrong."

In previous debates and conversations Ministers have emphasised the need for the revenue from these charges. Whatever concessions my right hon. Friend may produce this evening, he cannot go against that requirement in any significant way. I do not see why new resources for the National Health Service—I am not speaking only of inflation-proofing—must come from this source. The British economy is not now, thank God, in the hands of the IMF. We are not in the position of 1976, or even of 1980, when we were over-spent, over-borrowed and over-taxed.

[Mr. David Nicholson]

I am something of an iconoclast about the minutiæ of economic theology, but just assuming—and I do not—that the Treasury needs the money, I suggest two ways of meeting the requirement. I do not believe that my right hon. Friend the Minister can make the concessions this evening, but if, as I suspect, the clause runs into trouble in the Upper House, this will give him time to prepare.

One suggestion is a rather crude solution; nevertheless, I commend it for consideration. If Ministers are convinced that opticians need not pass on these charges, why not prohibit them from doing so? At the very least, will my right hon. Friend give a pledge that he will closely monitor opticians' practice, and if, either generally or in areas such as rural areas in which competition is low, they charge £10 or so, will he take powers to prevent that? That would help to diminish my opposition to this measure.

The second alternative was suggested to me by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe). It is that all holders of current driving licences should be obliged to have a sight test every three years, for which they would be charged the going rate. That would achieve three things. First, there would probably be more sight-testing among such people than there is now, which would be good for preventive medicine and the Treasury's income. Secondly, it would be good for road safety. Thirdly, people in households who own a car could generally be considered —I appreciate that there will be rough justice for some —able to pay. All others, particularly the elderly whose income, health or eyesight did not permit car driving, would have the eye tests free, as they do now.

The clause is symbolic of two tendencies which I fear and regret in present politics. First, there is the view that new resources—new resources in real terms—for the NHS can or should come from the extension of charges. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) referred to this, and in the previous debate my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) obliged us by saying that he believed that there should be charges for visits to GPs. I would never say never to that, but we need carefully to consider going down that route. There was no consideration of or consultation on this measure before it was announced last autumn.

Secondly, almost without intending it, and indeed almost without expecting it, in the past few weeks my party has drifted into a temporarily regressive fiscal regime. I refer to the combined effect of the Budget and some of the social security measures, especially housing benefit, which came into effect on Monday. The elderly, many of whom out of tradition and loyalty are our supporters, are distressed by this temporary situation. I say "temporary" because I believe that my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Secretary of State can put those matters right.

This measure is symbolic of that approach, which is why I cannot support it. I regret having to disregard the advice which, no doubt, my right hon. Friend the Minister will offer, but although the voice at the end of the debate will be the gentle and reasonable voice of my right hon. Friend, the hands which have introduced such a discordant measure into this otherwise excellent Bill—a measure that militates against the preventive medicine which the rest of the Bill promotes—have been the hairy old hands of the Treasury.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): We have had an excellent debate, although I have listened in vain for any words from any part of the House in support of the Government's proposals. I make my short contribution from a special and privileged position in that I am a diabetic and, as such, I speak for many thousands of people who can and will be put at risk if this piece of legislation is passed.

The Government have made a mistake. It is a good Government who can recognise that they have made a mistake and withdraw it before it is too late. In the five years in which I have been a Member I have never spoken or voted against the Government, but this evening I shall, because I feel strongly that diabetics are being done a disservice by the Government's proposals.

It is possible, just possible, that my right hon. Friend the Minister will say that he will make a concession to diabetics, but I put it to him that that is rather like closing the stable door after the horse has bolted. More often than not a person discovers that he is a diabetic as a consequence of his eye tests rather than the other way round. If a person is deflected from having an eye test he does not find out that he is a diabetic until perhaps it is a little too far down the road.

I am lucky; diabetes was detected in good time, so it will not materially affect me during the rest of my life. But many people are not in that lucky position. If they must make—this point has been eloquently put by hon. Members—the choice between buying a pair of shoes for their children and having an eye test, which cannot cost less than £10 and almost certainly will cost a great deal more, they may suffer diabetes with all the attendant consequences.

I am concerned at the principle which the Government have announced and introduced in this way. Yesterday we had another excellent debate on cervical smears. How long will it be before the Government decide that it is a good idea to charge ladies for having cervical smears? When the Government do that, where do we end?

The Government should listen to those who are their most loyal and best supporters on these Back Benches and should not proceed with this piece of nonsense legislation, which will not do the reputation of the Government, the Minister or the Conservative party any good. I urge those Conservative Members who have not heard the whole of the debate not to go slavishly into the Division Lobby to support the Government. I do not regard this as a political issue. It is a conscience issue which should have been given a free vote. I hope that hon. Members will join me in the Opposition Lobby.

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): I and other Conservative Members expressed our grave concern at this proposal when it came before the House on Second Reading in the hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would see his way to reconsider his ill-advised proposals, which we all realised did not originate from him or from within his Department.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has admitted in a parliamentary reply to me only this week that he can make no estimate of the number of people who are likely no longer to have eye tests because of the imposition of these charges. He has assured the House that in his judgment it will not be a significant number, but none of us can possibly know what will be the drop in take-up of eye tests.

In a matter as serious as this—many of my hon. Friends have explained this to the House and I touched on it on Second Reading—we are talking not just of people's eyesight but of the many diseases that can be detected in time, allowing positive action to be taken to protect the health and sometimes the lives of individuals. I am not prepared to see my constituents' health and lives gambled with in this way. The way in which the Government have tried to bulldoze this measure through is unacceptable, taking no account, as it does, of the strong representations made to them by their hon. Friends.

Mr. Dalyell: The hon. Gentleman said that the proposals did not come from DHSS Ministers. Some of us think that it is unlikely that they came from Treasury Ministers. It is not the Treasury's nature specifically to say, "You shall have such and such measures on eye tests." The Treasury does not operate in that way. From where did the proposals come?

Mr. Churchill: I am afraid that I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman. I am inclined to think that the Treasury takes a close interest in the budgets of spending Departments. This measure has nothing to do with health but everything to do with the penny-pinching attitude enforced by the Treasury on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and, I regret, accepted by him. It is a mean-spirited measure which is unworthy of the Government. With great regret, because there is so much in the Bill that I applaud, I feel impelled to vote against this measure.

Mr. Newton: I do not think that in response to the question asked by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) I can add anything to what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in the previous debate on dental charges.

I want to remind the House of the basic position on the Government's proposal. It is not a matter, as the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) sought to imply in a debate yesterday, of seeking to abolish NHS sight tests, any more than we abolished help with spectacles some two years ago. The proposal is to confine that test in much the same way as help with spectacle vouchers, in a scheme which I believe is widely recognised to have been successful, to certain groups, including those on low incomes, and to use that money—I say this without any sense of shame—for other purposes in developing what we believe to be more significant aspects of our primary care services, with an even more important prevention role. I shall return to that later.

No less than one third of the population—one person in three—would remain entitled to NHS tests. They would include all children, all members of families on family credit, all those on income support and all those who are registered blind or partially sighted. One in three of the population would remain entitled.

Sir Raymond Gower (Vale of Glamorgan): Can my right hon. Friend explain the distinction between the exemptions in this case and exemptions in the case of prescription? Would it not take a lot of the sting out of the proposals and answer much of the criticism if those exemptions were extended to eyesight tests?

8.30 pm

Mr. Newton: The distinction goes back a very long way, to the arrangements introduced in relation to spectacles and prescriptions by the Labour Government in 1951 when charges were initially introduced into the Health Service.

It has also been acknowledged—this picks up a point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) and a number of other hon. Members—that there is no intention to impose a particular charge for tests for those who will no longer be entitled to an NHS test. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) fairly used the figure of £9·30, which is paid to some ophthalmic opticians, although there are others who, for rather curious historical reasons, receive £10. The £10 figure is simply intended to reflect what the DHSS currently pays for a sight test carried out by some of those who do sight tests.

I accept the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme and a number of other hon. Members that we cannot by definition know what, if any, the charge would be for private sight tests in future, because that would be for the market to determine. However, in the light of our experience of the market for spectacles, following the ending of free NHS spectacles and the introduction of vouchers, it seems to me to be overwhelmingly likely that the competition will keep any charge to a modest level.

I am strengthened in that view by the fact that any regular reader of the optical press will find advertisements that offer to pay ophthalmic opticians more for conducting sight tests than the DHSS will pay. One such advertisement offers a fee per capita in excess of £10 per sight test. Another, which relates to Tyne and Wear, Northumberland and County Durham, offers two optometrists a salary package in excess of £35,000, which can include a fully furnished luxury flat, company car, pension and private health insurance,

"coupled with an excellent working environment in modern, well-equipped practices."

A profession that can widely offer such salary packages and offer to pay people for doing sight tests more than they will be reimbursed by the DHSS must contain scope for a considerable amount of downward competitive pressure on some of its activities.

Mr. Churchill: Is my right hon. Friend suggesting that the extravagant salaries and perks to which he has referred are now to be borne largely by pensioners and others who do not qualify for the exemption? Is it not even now possible for the Government to reconsider a blanket exemption for pensioners from the charges, as they are the ones who have to go back again and again for sight tests?

Mr. Newton: I shall say something more about pensioners in a moment or two.

First, however, I acknowledge that much of the debate has turned on the question whether there will be a significant deterrent effect for that part of the population —I emphasise again that it will not be those on the lowest incomes—who would be expected to pay any charge that might be levied. I accept, as I have throughout our debates on the proposals, that that is not a point that I could, or would, dismiss out of hand.

Apart from anything else, it cannot be a matter of certainty; it has to be a matter of judgment based on

[Mr. Newton]

experience. However, we have highly relevant experience in the form of what has happened in the market for spectacles. The hon. Member for Livingston pressed me to explain why there had been a change in the Government's position of eight years ago. One of the things that has significantly changed since then is that we have introduced a different policy in respect of the NHS spectacles market which has proved to have had a significantly successful effect on the optical market, and we have sought to build in part on that experience.

Mr. Robin Cook: May I press the Minister on the point fairly and pertinently raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)? My hon. Friend reminded the House that a previous Secretary of State said five years ago that the Government

"believe that the access to a free sight test is important in detecting serious eye disease."—[*Official Report*, 20 December 1983; Vol. 51, c. 295.]

Will the Minister make it clear to the House whether the medical advice from his chief medical officer varied from the advice received five years ago? Has the chief medical officer of health revised his advice on the basis of experience in spectacles?

Mr. Newton: I cannot add to what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in that respect. In any event, I shall gladly undertake to write to the hon. Gentleman, but I am not in a position, apart from anything else, to be sure of the precise basis on which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, then the Secretary of State for Social Services, made those remarks eight—or was it five?—years ago.

Dame Jill Knight: With the greatest reluctance, I must press my right hon. Friend, because this is a matter of supreme importance, to say whether the advice has changed, or whether the situation has changed. Why has the measure been introduced?

Mr. Newton: I hope and believe that I have already answered that question by reference to the change that was carried through the House which led to the introduction of the NHS spectacle voucher scheme and the ending of the old NHS spectacle regime. That change, which was completed in 1986, has given us significant new experience of the operation of competition in that market and has left us better placed to assess the consequences of the changes that we propose.

Mr. Cormack: My right hon. Friend is replying with his customary courtesy. However, can I press him on this? Is the Government's best and highest medical advice that charging will not be a deterrent and that it will be in everyone's best interests? There should be a simple answer to that question, and my right hon. Friend ought to be able to ascertain that information from a certain quarter during his reply.

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear the chief medical officer's attitude to the proposals in the White Paper as a whole, which seek to develop our primary care services as a whole and which the Government argue will contribute to a significant improvement to the health of the nation as a whole. It is as a whole that it is right for the policies to be considered.

There is one highly significant piece of evidence from our experience of the scheme that has operated in relation to spectacles and spectacle vouchers since July 1986 which enables us to make a judgment about the possible deterrent effects referred to in the debate. According to a survey conducted by the economists advisory group for one of the optical bodies of those who are entitled to vouchers for their spectacles—by definition broadly the same groups as will continue to be entitled to NHS sight tests, including those on the lowest incomes—some three quarters willingly pay significantly more than £10 on average above the voucher values for their spectacles.

When the survey was conducted, the lowest voucher value was just over £14. At that time, people generally paid more than £15 extra on top of that for their spectacles and the sums ranged as high as £20 and more for some of the higher spectacle voucher values. People have willingly been paying significantly more for their spectacles, in addition to the voucher values, than any sum that has been mentioned as a possible charge for eye testing.

Mr. Terence Higgins (Worthing): My right hon. Friend relies heavily on the comparison with the situation in relation to spectacles, but if we rely on the forces of competition there will be real dangers. At present, the expression "eye test" is rather vague. Much of the debate has centred on the detection of glaucoma and so on. I understand that at present many eye tests do not cover that aspect, because the opticians involved are not capable of doing so. If we rely on the forces of competition, it is likely that the test will consist purely of the eye test, without the extensive medical coverage that is required. Is there not a danger that, as the price is driven down, the quality of the test will deteriorate?

Mr. Newton: I hope that I am not doing my right hon. Friend an injustice, but I think that he may have missed my speech yesterday, when the House agreed to insert new clause 15 with the precise purpose of allowing the Government to take powers to determine the content of the eye test to ensure that an eye examination remains part of the test. In fact, somebody has challenged the need for such an examination to be carried out under the present regime, so the validity of the present situation has been called into question. We have made it clear that we intend to ensure by regulation that the test includes the eye examination to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) attaches importance.

Mr. Higgins: I understand that at present the eye test does not always include that kind of check, because some opticians do not have the necessary equipment.

Mr. Newton: I shall deal with that point in my comments about diabetics. My right hon. Friend is right in saying that there is a difference of view about what a full examination entails and that at present not all opticians have the necessary equipment to carry out what is known as tonometry, with the result that the necessary pressure tests are not always carried out. That is the present situation. The professional requirements do not necessarily entail carrying out such tests, but I shall return to that point.

I will deal with some of the specific concerns against the background of my judgment that, on the figures that I have given, the alleged deterrent effect is most unlikely to occur. However, I accept that that must be a matter of

judgment against the background of experience, and I do not intend to use that judgment as a means of avoiding considerations of the specific concerns expressed in the debate.

With regard to low incomes, I have already said that people on income support or family credit will remain entitled to a free NHS sight test. That group will include, we estimate, a quarter of all pensioners. Indeed, the number will have increased as a result of recent changes in the social security system and in particular the higher pensioner's premium. In low-paid working families, more than 750,000 adults in such families will continue to be entitled to free sight tests. That number is estimated to have grown by nearly 500,000—in other words, it has more that doubled—as a result of the change from family income supplement to family credit. Those are important and significant figures.

In the light of the points made in earlier discussions and in today's debate, we intend to introduce arrangements to provide help for those with incomes just above those qualifying levels. The precise arrangements will need to be worked out, and if necessary we shall seek to amend the Bill in another place to achieve that purpose.

Mr. Fry: How many more pensioners are likely to be covered by the additional relief that my right hon. Friend has just announced?

Mr. Newton: It will be some tens of thousands. As we have not yet been able to work out the details, and as the calculation will involve some complexity in the light of the new arrangements, I cannot give more detail than that.

8.45 pm

We share the concern about glaucoma that has been expressed by Members in all parts of the House. Everyone wishes glaucoma to be detected at a stage when it can be effectively treated. At present, when an optician detects signs of glaucoma, the patient is referred to the family doctor. In almost all cases, confirmation of the diagnosis and subsequent mangement and care are provided by the hospital eye service. That will remain the position. As the debate has made clear, however, the process is broadly opportunistic and covers only people who visit an optician, usually because of some problem with their eyes. By definition, therefore, the symptomless glaucomas which have given most cause for concern in the debate are least likely to be picked up by what is an accidental rather than a systematic screening process.

Where the eye examination involves only ophthoalmoscopy, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing pointed out, the condition may not be detected at the earliest possible stage under the present system. Tonometry and visual field tests can provide earlier detection, but are not always undertaken by opticians. One of the ways in which we shall seek to carry things forward in the light of the resource changes proposed in the White Paper and the Bill is to discuss with the profession which tests should be included in the definition of the eye test with the aim of achieving further improvements in the testing process. I believe that that will help the concerns of the House.

We have also been discussing how to tackle the problem of identifying those at higher risk of suffering glaucoma. As there is a strong hereditary element, people over 40 who are children, brothers or sisters of people with glaucoma are at increased risk of themselves developing the condition. We are therefore considering whether and how —I believe that it should be possible to move in this direction, although it will not be as easy as I should like —if necessary by using additional resources, arrangements can be devised to ensure that, whenever glaucoma is identified in a patient, positive steps are taken to ensure that members of the family who may be at risk are identified and their attention drawn to the need for an eye test. I believe that that would do more to improve real screening for glaucoma in good time than anything in the present arrangements.

As I have said, almost all those who already have or are found to have glaucoma are treated by the hospital eye service, although there may be circumstances in which the doctors managing the case will wish to involve an optician. Free sight tests will therefore be available for patients with glaucoma who are referred to an optician by the doctor.

Diabetes has been mentioned as a special area of concern in perhaps more speeches than any other single issue. There are really two separate issues here. Until I heard certain comments in the debate, I thought that it was common ground that sight testing was neither a sensible nor an effective means of screening for diabetes. In Committee, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State quoted the director of a regional retina service as saying: "it is exceptionally rare for diabetes to be detected by the observation of retinopathy in a person who is otherwise not known to be suffering from the disease."
The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith), with his own particular medical expertise, intervened in my hon. Friend's speech to say:

"We have already accepted that the method for diagnosing diabetes and hypertension is not fundoscopic examination of the eye."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 16 February 1988; c. 751-2.]

Mr. Galbraith: We also accept that it was a useful addition. It was not a primary method of screening or of diagnosis. Secondly, a regular check-up for diabetics is important in order to look for the retinopathy.

Mr. Newton: I want to say something about that as well. But in relation to retinopathy and hypertension, general practitioners should play a more active role in screening their patients for such conditions, and they should make good arrangements—for example, through regular diabetic or hypertension clinics, which many good general practitioners already do—for their continuing care. That is precisely one of the objectives that we are pursuing in the discussions now taking place with the medical profession about the restructuring of its remuneration and allowances, using the additional resources which the Bill will enable us to make available. I have no doubt that that represents a more effective use of those resources than the maintenance of universal NHS eye tests.

The second issue is the need for regular screening of the eyes of diabetic people, however diagnosed for diabetic retinopathy. The importance of that has already been acknowledged by the Government in the three-year study that is currently being undertaken, and that is due to end next year, to evaluate the most cost-effective way of screening for that condition. We shall, of course, consider what further steps may be appropriate in the light of its results.

Meanwhile, we have listened carefully to what has been said during the discussion on the Bill, including by many of my hon. Friends and others tonight. We recognise that

[Mr. Newton]

diabetics have a special need for regular eye checks for the detection of retinopathy. Diabetes itself is usually managed by the patient's family doctor or by a clinic if that is desirable. However, some doctors may wish to refer their patients to an optician specifically for those regular eye checks. We wish to support that practice, so we shall make arrangements in the regulations which will provide for free sight tests for diabetics who are referred for an eye check by their GP or clinic. That could potentially benefit some 750,000 people a year.

I hope that those of my right hon. and hon. Friends and others who have spoken in the debate will think that the steps that we have taken in relation to people on low incomes, those with glaucoma and diabetics, constitute a proper and reasonable response to the points that they have raised. They will together reduce the savings which would otherwise have been expected from the measure by some £7 million to £8 million, and, as I have said, extend by at least 750,000 those entitled to NHS sight tests.

I recognise that those steps cannot entirely meet the views of those who argue against the proposals, simply because we are talking about examinations rather than treatment. But to them I have to say that, whether expenditure on health is labelled as prevention, treatment or cure, it is important that we use it to the best effect. Our proposals to redirect some part of the expenditure in this area from its present purpose to others, and in particular to the systematic development of the quality, scope and preventative nature of our family doctor services, will enable us to do more, not less, to promote the heath of the nation.

Mr. Robin Cook: Eight Conservative Back Benchers have spoken in the course of the debate. As it happens, that is exactly the same number as in the previous debate. Those of my hon. Friends who were present at the end of the previous debate will recall that the scoreboard was five out of eight against the Government's proposals and two out of the eight in support of it.

I have to report that, having kept my scoreboard throughout this debate, of the eight Conservative Back Benchers who have spoken, all eight were against the proposal. There was not a speech in the entire debate, until the Minister for Health rose to speak at the Dispatch Box, in support of the proposal for charging for the eye examination. There has not been an intervention in any speech in the course of the debate in support of charges for the eye examination.

This parliamentary debate has been important because it has exposed the fact that this particular proposal cannot be sustained and is supported only by the Minister who came to the Dispatch Box to defend it. Nobody else came to the Chamber to support the proposal tonight. That demonstrates the importance of the Report stage in the examination of Bills. If parliamentary consideration and examination mean anything, this proposal, after the examination and debate that it has received tonight, should be thrown out.

I want to say a few words about what the Minister said in reply to the debate. The intervention in the Minister's speech by his right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) was well-merited, in that the first half of the Minister's speech based the Government's proposal on their experience with the charges and competition which they have introduced in the spectacles market. That was wholly at variance with the gravamen of the debate that preceded the Minister's reply. The gravamen of that debate was about people who had suffered from serious systematic diseases such as glaucoma, cataracts and diabetes, which is almost irrelevant to whether they require eye tests to determine whether they need spectacles.

To the suggestion that competition may bring down charges, I have to say that it is possible. It is possible that as a result of competition not every optometrist will charge £9·30. It is also possible that, as a result of competition, prices will go up. In America there is competition for this type of eye examination and the prices are very high indeed. Indeed, a Conservative Back Bencher spelt out what remarkably good value the eye examination is for £9·30, with half an hour's time of a highly-qualified technician using extremely expensive equipment. If they were to put a charge on their service that represented the full market cost of that half hour, they would be charging well above £9·30.

Yes, it is possible that competition could bring down charges. Let us suppose that competition is so intense and successful that it halves the charge. We would still be talking about an eye examination charge of £5. Who in this Chamber is prepared to say that that will not be a deterrent to some people who are on the margins? Moreover, it will only halve the charge at the expense of lower income to optometrists from eye examinations. That will have two consequences.

The first consequence is that the optometrist service will contract. It will be centralised in the areas of urban population. I warn Conservative Members that it is their constituents rather than ours who will be likely to suffer most from that withdrawal of services from centres of urban populations.

Secondly, it will inevitably drive optometrists—indeed, the Minister came near to saying that this was the intention of the competition—to look more and more for their income and profit to the sale of spectacles rather than to eye examiniations and the provision of a full examination of the inner eye.

Do hon. Members believe that in that competitive environment in which optometrists are more and more obliged to look for commercial sale of their spectacles that we shall have optometrists who are prepared to take the time, and with the experience and qualifications, to detect the kind of rare case referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish), in which a woman with secondary cancer was diagnosed because she presented herself for an eye examination and whose life was therefore saved?

I am well aware that the House wishes to move to a Division, but I want to return to the telling intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). He asked what had been the medical advice offered to the Government by the chief medical officer. We can certainly hear what the advice has been from the House tonight. Every hon. Member who has spoken in the debate has expressed concern about the medical consequences of the charge; the medical consequences of the deterrent effect of that fee being introduced. I find it very difficult indeed to credit that the medical advice that the Government may have received from the chief medical officer could have varied from the advice that the Minister has heard in the House tonight. The Minister said that he relied upon what the Secretary of State said in response to the earlier debate.

In response to the earlier debate the Secretary of State said that the chief medical officer had endorsed the White Paper as a whole.

All Opposition Members, at any rate, have experience of putting our names to composite resolutions. We know what that means. Inevitably on every occasion one swallows something that one would dearly have liked to leave out. The question remains: what was the chief medical officer's advice in respect of the charges for eye examinations? What advice did he tender to Ministers on whether such a charge would deter people from turning up? What advice did he offer them on the one screening method which currently produces three times as many diagnoses of glaucoma as any other screening arrangement? The Minister said that he would write to me telling me what that advice was. Unfortunately, that letter will arrive after the Division tonight.

There is a way round that predicament. Frankly, if the Minister was listening to the debate tonight, and if Treasury Ministers were interested in taking the temper of the House of Commons, the response of the Minister would be clear. He would accept the amendment and withdraw the proposal. If the Minister can justify the proposal in a way in which he has been unable to justify it tonight, he can always reintroduce it in the other place. If he is going to say that we must wait until another day to find out what was the medical advice on which the proposal was based, I have to say to him that no self-respecting House of Commons can tolerate that offer. We shall, therefore, press the amendment to a Division and we hope that all hon. Members who have heard the debate and who share our deep trouble and concern about the consequences of the proposal will join us in the Lobby tonight.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 206, Noes 280.

Division No. 259] **[9.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Patrick
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Day, Stephen
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fry, Peter
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holt, Richard
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Illsley, Eric
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCusker, Harold
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
Madden, Max
Madel, David
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meacher, Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Sims, Roger
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack

Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Fearn: I beg to move amendment No. 66, in page 11, line 37, at end insert—

'( ) Subsection (4)(b) shall apply, in the case of a person suffering from a prescribed medical condition, both to the inspection or course of treatment during which the condition is diagnosed and to subsequent inspections and courses of treatment while the condition continues to be diagnosed or suspected'.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 76, in page 14, line 6, at end insert—

'( ) Subsection (1C)(b) shall apply, in the case of a person suffering from a prescribed medical condition, both to the inspection or course of treatment during which the condition is diagnosed and to subsequent inspections and courses of treatment while the condition continues to be diagnosed or suspected'.

Mr. Fearn: These amendments are designed to ensure that patients with prescribed medical conditions are not

charged for examinations for the entire period during which they suffer from those conditions. Thus, the whole procedure, or series of procedures, when the condition is first diagnosed is exempted from any charge and this exemption continues until the end of the episode of care during which the patient is finally cleared of any suspicion of still suffering from the condition. Unless this interpretation is made clear and is entrenched, the promotion of good health will be put at risk.

Again, as with dental charges, we take particular exception to the proposal to charge for eye examinations and we have voted against it, but, as the Opposition amendment failed a few moments ago, we shall expect support for the view that our interpretation of the period of exemption from charges as set out in amendments Nos. 66 and 76 is the correct one.

9.15 pm

Mr. Newton: Our understanding of the effect of the amendment is that a prescribed medical condition is one of the criteria which may be used to define eligibility for NHS sight tests. The amendment would ensure that the sight test at which the prescribed condition was found and subsequent tests were NHS tests.

The only comment that I can make on this slightly arcane point is that there is already power to extend NHS tests to those suffering from prescribed medical conditions. In my previous speech I said something about diabetics. The amendment would simply provide that the test at which the condition was found could also be an NHS test. However, if the person is having a test, it seems likely that he has not been deterred by the private fee.

I said earlier that we would make changes in the arrangements for diabetics and those at risk from glaucoma. I shall examine what the hon. Gentleman has said against what is on the Amendment Paper. If it turns out that we need a provision of the kind proposed in the amendment, I shall be prepared to consider it later. I am not at present persuaded, partly because I think that there is confusion about the purpose and purport of the amendment.

Mr. Fearn: It would appear from what I hear that the Minister accepts the general theme that I have put forward. Therefore, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendments made: No. 31, in page 12, line 12, leave out

'The services provided under this section'

and insert

'Regulations shall define the services for the provision of which arrangements under this section are to be made and the services so defined'.

No. 32, in page 14, line 29, leave out

'The services provided under this section'

and insert

'Regulations shall define the services for the provision of which arrangements under this section are to be made and the services so defined'.

No. 33, in page 12, line 35, leave out 'subsection' and insert 'section'.

No. 34, in page 14, line 41, leave out 'subsection' and insert 'section'.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Clause 11

SIGHT-TESTING

Amendment made: No. 35, in page 15, line 1, leave out clause 11.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Clause 13

LIMITS ON REIMBURSEMENT OF EXPENSES

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: I beg to move amendment No. 85, in page 16, line 25, leave out clause 13.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, we will take the following amendments: No, 77, in page 16, line 36, at end insert—

'( ) It shall be the duty of a Family Practitioner Committee to report to the Secretary of State any instance when it considers that the amount allotted under subsection (97)(1)(b)(ii) above is insufficient for the purposes prescribed, and to make known to the public in its locality the content of such report'.

No. 78, in page 17, line 2, at end insert—

'( ) It shall be the duty of a Health Board to report to the Secretary of State any instance when it considers that the amount allotted under subsection (85)(2)(a) above is insufficient for the purposes prescribed, and to make known to the public in its locality the content of such report'.

No. 79, in page 17, line 7, at end insert—

'(5) Each Family Practitioner Committee and each Health Board shall have the duty to satisfy itself, after consulting such bodies as appears to it to represent the interests of the public in its locality within the National Health Service, that the payments made pursuant to this section are available without discrimination in all parts of its locality and to all practitioners in contract with it and covered by any such allotment'.

Mrs. Ewing: In view of the time, I intend to be brief. I was not a member of the Standing Committee which considered the Bill but I have read the debate in Committee on clause 13. Many of the details were well aired in the debate. However, it is right at this stage that hon. Members who did not have the opportunity to participate in that debate should search further to find out whether the Government have advanced their thinking on these issues.

I want to refer to statements by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State. She referred to doctors who

"were worried that the new system has not been explained sufficiently to allay their fears. This is partly because some of the details . . . are still to be worked out."

I wonder whether the Government have worked out further details. She also said:

"My first and most important reassurance is that we firmly anticipate spending a great deal more on the services than currently."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 23 February 1988; c. 870.]

Can a specific figure be offered by the Government now, particularly in view of the fact that later in that debate the Parliamentary Under-Secretary said that she was hoping that funds would be raised from the implementation of clauses 8 and 10? We have had a concession from the Minister for Health that there will be a reduction of £7 million to £8 million as a result of his statement. Will that affect in any way the money which comes in?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State also indicated that it was not the Government's expectation that the clause would come into effect immediately. It seems strange to include in the Bill a clause which is not to

[Mrs. Ewing]

be implemented until negotiations are complete. Surely we must be given a final date which will be applied to the negotiations.

We put our general practitioners in the front line of medicine. We turn to them in times of crisis and indeed of health. How can we expect them to expand and improve primary care and preventive medicine, yet put cash limitations on their ability to do so? If we expect our GPs to take a pro-active role, we must take account of their financial needs. It is wrong to place cash limits on GPs in the clause, rather than look at the service and the needs of patients.

It is clear that general practitioners have been very cost-effective in their application of the funding available to them. I will quote from a letter that I received from Grampian local medical committee, because that is my local medical authority. The committee is deeply concerned about the implications of the clause. The letter says:

"We would emphasise that such cash-limiting is not necessary, as the service we provide is widely recognised as being extraordinarily cost-effective—the cost of the availability and services of the General Practitioner being around £28 per patient per year, which includes all the expenses of running a practice."

For a Government who talk of cost-effectiveness, I do not think that I could find a better example of a cost-effective service than that provided in Grampian at a cost of £28 per patient per year.

Because of other financial pressures being exercised on the National Health Service, and presssure on the Grampian health board budget, several practices, mainly in health centres, are already withdrawing treatment room nurse provision. Arrangements are being negotiated so that the GPs will meet part of the cost, the whole cost previously having been borne by the health board. Against that sort of background, I ask the Government to withdraw the clause until we have sorted things out and know in our own minds exactly what to do. They should give our general practitioners the vote of confidence that they so obviously deserve.

Mr. Sims: I am anxious not to protract the proceedings, but I am sure that I am not the only hon. Member who has had letters from GPs within his constituency. They are concerned that the effect of the clause will be to restrict the extent to which patients consult them. I am sure that that is not intended, and it would be helpful if the Minister could give appropriate assurances when replying to the debate. Indeed, perhaps at some stage what is known as a "Dear Doctor" letter can be sent clarifying the situation so that these misunderstandings can be removed.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): In my constituency, people are very fortunate in the high quality and standards offered to them by the general practitioner service throughout Angus. I have had the opportunity to visit practices in Montrose, and I was very impressed by their use of technology, and modernisation assisting in patient care, to ensure an efficient and caring service.

My purpose in speaking is to draw to the Government's attention the views of such working general practitioners. These practical and qualified men and women are concerned about the Government's proposals. I shall be using their words, and I hope that the Minister will respond to them.

The substance of clause 13 implies a concept of cash limiting the funding of primary care services, and it is that to which these general practitioners are opposed. Montrose practices are typical of those in Angus, and elsewhere in Scotland, in that forward-looking practices are extending their functions in preventive medicine to include cervical and other screening procedures and the care of the sick at home in the community. In national terms these services are cost effective because they relieve hospitals of additional burdens. If cash limits are imposed on primary care, such initiatives will be abandoned. My doctors believe that it will revert to a "national sickness" service.

The unique contractual relationship within the NHS means that general practitioners have a direct incentive to extend and improve services, retaining, in their own interests, the need to be very cost effective. There is an entrepreneurial attitude in Montrose, which its GPs believe should be supported by the Government rather than be hamstrung by cash limiting.

General practice in the United Kingdom is experiencing a renaissance of technological development, an extension of function and an improvement in services for patients. Notwithstanding that, the cost to the state is lower than in any other country in the Western developed world. The profession is willing and has the capacity to do much more in primary care, but that attitude will be to no avail if cash limits are imposed.

The doctors in another Montrose practice state:

"Primary care is cost-effective at present, with patients entitled to open access to Primary Health Care services, with no limits on the number of consultations."

Despite that open-endedness, the primary health care system is cost effective, making this unlimited access available at the cost of about £28 per patient per year in total for expenses and paying for the general practitioner. Those doctors believe that cash limiting is an attempt to bring the hospital cuts into the sphere of general practice, and there will be cuts if the clause is passed.

Hospital cuts have led to longer waiting lists which have increased the work load on GPs; for example, because patients require attention for pain relief and drugs while waiting for admission. Earlier discharge from hospital means that GPs treat more people with drugs which otherwise would have been provided from hospital, thus adding to the work load and costs of general practice.

Rationing primary health care is not a desirable option and any attempt at rationing in this sphere would impose limitations on patient access to primary health care. My doctors believe that cash limits are not necessary. In general, practice costs are largely reimbursed on the basis of national average cost levels and GPs control their costs tightly to maintain their practice income. This in turn ensures that average cost levels are maintained in future years. Therefore, doctors have a personal incentive in controlling costs, resulting in national saving.

The Government want GPs to develop their service to patients, but to do that they must have sufficient quality staff. Doctors state that it is obvious from their surgeries that ancillary staff offer great benefits to patients, for example, in easing the arrangements between patients and hospitals, ambulances, social work departments, the DHSS, employers, the district nurse and the health visitor,

and by making available in the surgery treatments which would normally mean a patient having to travel to hospital. The benefits cover the whole spectrum of staff, from practising nurses to administrators, secretaries and receptionists. The direct reimbursement scheme pays only part of those salaries and GPs shoulder the remainder, so they have a powerful incentive to be cost effective.

The doctors of Montrose have attractive premises in the town, but they state that with cash limitations even planned projects will now be made more doubtful, let alone new projects. Limitations on the existing cost-rent scheme threaten them, but further cash limiting would torpedo them altogether.

"This direct reimbursement scheme also has powerful incentives to cost-effective development, for although the scheme yields a return on capital invested in practice premises, the GP still has to put up the capital and bear the burden of increased running costs of new or improved premises."

Those are the words of working GPs who deal not only with the theory, but with the practice, of medicine. The Government's proposals will threaten directly their work and efficiency. I support my hon. Friend in opposing clause 13 and I hope that the Minister will listen and respond to the genuine voice of the medical profession.

Mr. Fearn: I support amendment No. 85. We do not believe that the case for imposing cash limits has been made by the Government. There is no evidence that across the country GPs plan to be unreasonable in their demands to take advantage of what the Government clearly see as a potential loophole in the Bill. On the contrary, GPs will be reasonable and will not employ more staff than they need to look after their patients. However, it is certain that the Government will not concede this point. Accordingly, amendments Nos. 77 and 78 place a duty on a general practitioner committee or a health board to make a public report to the relevant Secretary of State if they believe that their allocation for these purposes is insufficient.

The amendment assumes that family practitioner committees will be responsible. If they need to report they will reflect the inadequacy of Government provision. Any responsible Government would welcome such a report and take action to remedy the unsatisfactory state of affairs. We cannot see any justification for the Government refusing to accept the amendment.

Amendment No. 79 places a duty upon FPCs to ensure that, if a limited sum is available, it is distributed in a non-discriminatory manner. It would be entirely inappropriate if an FPC benefited part of its area at the expense of other parts. The amendment also strengthens the hands of FPCs in their planning functions. It will help FPCs to strengthen services in deprived parts of their areas. The fact that they can plead that statutory duty is likely to overcome the resistance that they might encounter. That can only benefit the service. In other words, FPCs can become more active in aiding the development of services. It will no longer be sufficient for FPCs simply to react to events. I hope that the amendments, like some of my others, are not too clever for the Minister.

9.30 pm

Ms. Harman: I rise briefly to support amendment No. 85. There is universal opposition to cash-limiting the family doctor service. Representations have been made to Members of Parliament, including no doubt to members of the Government, from worried general practitioners around the country. I challenge the Government to name one single independent reputable organisation that supports the cash-limiting of GP services. I am talking about anybody the Under-Secretary of State can mention who supports clause 13, not about people who have made statements of general support for the White Paper. Nobody supports clause 13 and its cash limits.

General practitioners are absolutely right to be fearful. It is clear that the Government now intend to wield the axe over GP services in exactly the same way as they have chopped hospital services.

I hope that the Government will not insult our intelligence tonight by saying that they are introducing cash limits so that they can spend more than they currently spend. We were not born yesterday. It is unbelievable to think that in introducing a clause entitled,

"Limits on reimbursement of expenses"

the Government are introducing the clause to enable them to spend more. It is nonsense to say that a cash limit will improve and develop services. A cash limit is there simply to limit cash. It will stifle the development of services.

GP services do need developing. We want to see the benefits of new technology harnessed for the benefit of patients. New technology in communication and in diagnostic equipment should be available to GPs. We want to see GPs work as part of an enhanced team with nurses, health visitors, midwives, chiropodists, physiotherapists and other health professionals. We want to see GPs' premises improved so that they provide pleasant waiting and treatment areas with easy access for parents with small children and for disabled people. We want to see GPs develop their work on screening and prevention and provide, at local level, diabetic clinics, ante-natal services and counselling on diet and smoking. There is no chance of those developments taking place if, instead of saying to family doctors, "Let us discuss how we can improve services", the Government say, "Go away and cut costs."

It is not as if at any time in Committee the Government pointed out that there has been an inefficient use of resources. Family practitioner committees are already obliged to, and do, take into account value for money. If anything, we would criticise them for having erred on the side of caution and for not pressing hard enough or fast enough to develop and improve GP services. It is clear that the Government intend to squeeze GP services. They want to use the dissatisfaction that that creates in patients as an excuse to bring in commercial, American-style health maintenance organisations. That would be a catastrophic mistake.

The family doctor service is not perfect, but it is a good base and provides a good framework on which to build. The problem is that the Government do not want universal public provision of primary care services. This is the first step on the road to undermining those services.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary has been kind enough to inform me that she issued a press release earlier today, announcing an initiative on practice nurse training. I welcome the fact that the Government are taking this initiative but I feel that it is not a serious measure because of the sum of money and the number of nurses involved. The training initiative has, we are told in the press statement, attracted only £150,000 of Government money. That addition to nurse training must be looked at against a background of a cut of £40 million in nurse training provision between 1979 and today. The figure of £40 million comes from a parliamentary answer from the Minister. We are told that the training initiative is to cover

[Ms. Harman]

500 nurses; but that must be looked at against a background of a cut in the intake of student and pupil nurses of 12,550 between 1979 and now. That figure again comes from a parliamentary answer from the Minister.

I hope that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary will acknowledge that, although the Government now say that they are promoting practice nurse training, this is a very measly start from a Government with a shameful record on nurse training. I hear the Parliamentary Under-Secretary muttering that I do not understand the figures. I understand only too well that what the Government have done, in practice, in nurse training is cut programmes to ribbons. Yet they are trying to give themselves a bit of a public relations puff by announcing £150,000 to cover 500 nurses. The wool will not be pulled over our eyes in that respect.

Mrs. Currie: The system for paying general practitioners is, like that of the other family practitioner professions, based on the cost-plus principle which was established at the inception of the National Health Service. That is, the payments that they receive are intended to cover expenses and to provide on top a net income for every GP. Based on the return to the Inland Revenue, expenses incurred in providing general medical services are paid back to the profession in full. That is, if the tax man accepts it as a legitimate expense, we accept it.

Some of these expenses are paid back to the individual GP, and that is known as direct reimbursement. The remainder is reimbursed on an average basis through standard rate fees and allowances—that is, indirectly reimbursed—and general practitioners' net income is also delivered through fees and allowances. I am sure that the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn), who was an assistant bank manager, has understood all that.

Clause 13 will enable directly reimbursed expenses to be subject to a cash limit, but expenses not directly reimbursed in full will nonetheless be reimbursed indirectly through fees and allowances.

The total spend on family practitioner services in Britain is over £5,000 million, and by 1990-91 we hope to have increased it by some £600 million. I cannot tell the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) exactly how much will come under clause 13 because at least part of it will be the subject of discussions with the profession, but that is the sort of sum of money that we are talking about; and the directly reimbursed element of that sum amounts to £455 million in 1987-88. These are Great Britain figures.

Our proposals, as set out in the White Paper, would involve cash-limiting barely half of that. In other words, the proposals would cover less than 5 per cent. of the total spend on these important family practitioner services, and over 95 per cent. would continue to be run in exactly the same way as they are now.

Our intent, as was recognised in Committee, is to give family practitioner committees and health boards a chunk of money to help them concentrate premises improvement funds where they are most needed, particularly, for example, in the inner cities, and we also want them to help doctors everywhere to improve their practice teams, with a far wider range of staff than is currently possible. We are very concerned to improve the practice team. I share that view with the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh).

As the hon. Lady the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) said, I was very glad to announce earlier today that we are making an extra £150,000 available immediately to increase sharply the number of training opportunities for practice nurses. The detailed arrangements are a matter for discussion with the profession, but I expect to see rapid action as the money is available now. We hope that £50,000 will be used to create distance learning materials, including videos, which will help practice nurses all over the country, particularly those in rural areas such as the constituences of the hon. Member for Moray and Angus, East and my own, the sort of nurses in rural areas who cannot always get to meetings or training courses.

In addition, the bulk of the money will be used, I hope, to pay the course fee. If the hon. Lady the Member for Peckham wants to understand the figures and the amounts, perhaps she would like to listen to this. I hope that the bulk of the money will be used to pay the course fee for practice nurse training courses. Indeed, we expect more such courses to be set up as a result of that money. We foresee 500 nurses being able to take advantage of the extra money this year. If those courses are satisfactory, we hope to do the same next year. After that, clause 12, which has gone through all its stages without comment, will come into operation and will enable those fees to be paid.

The difference between that money and the money about which the hon. Member for Peckham was speaking is that it is used simply to pay course fees. The money about which the hon. Lady was speaking includes salaries.

I have told the officials concerned that I am particularly keen to improve training for practice nurses to take cervical smears, and I hope that the hon. Member for Peckham will at least say thank you for that.

We have been asked why we should not continue with the current set-up. The present ancillary staff scheme was introduced in the mid-1960s. Some 20 years on 24,000 family doctors in Great Britain are employing over 36,000 practice staff. Of that figuree, 16,000 are receptionists and 11,000 are secretaries, but the number of practice nurses is only 3,000. In Scotland, 3,000 family doctors have only 170 practice nurses for a population of 5 million, which is completely unsatisfactory.

We consider the present system to be far too restrictive because it does not encourage the recruitment of other health professionals such as chiropodists, counsellors and physiotherapists, and it prevents the payment of people such as doctors' wives, which I regard as iniquitous. We shall change that.

With regard to practice premises, we feel that the present system is unsatisfactory. Many examples of bad surgery premises were given in Committee. That system is used at present simply because there is a strong incentive for the doctor to do nothing, which answers the question of the hon. Member for Angus, East.

The present system is old-fashioned because it does not link spending with health needs and we shall do something about that in the near future. We think that cash limits will be useful as they will concentrate minds and enable priorities to be sorted out. I therefore reject the amendments.

Mrs. Ewing: If the Minister was seeking to reassure me, she has singularly failed to do so. I believe that there are various principles at stake in the amendment.

The Minister spoke of cash-limiting the total amount given. That would be detrimental to general practices throughout the United Kingdom. A principle is involved, because if half of the total amount is to be cash limited, as time goes on the amount cash limited will increase more and more.

I refer the Minister to what the British Medical Association said about clause 13. It said:

"Indeed it carries the potential to threaten patients' equality of access to services in the future."

Nothing that the Minister said showed that she will guarantee equality of access or protect the rights of general practitioners. Therefore, I feel that I have no option but to press the amendment to a vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 182, Noes 304.

Division No. 260] **[9.42 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCusker, Harold
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Welsh and
Mr. Archy Kirkwood.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric

Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 20

COMMENCEMENT AND TRANSITIONAL

Amendment made: No. 36, in page 19, line 40, leave out '11' and insert *'[Sight-testing];'.—[Mr. Newton.]*

Clause 21

NORTHERN IRELAND

Amendment made: No. 37, in page 21, line 5, leave out '11' and insert *'[Sight-testing]'.—[Mr. Newton.]*

Schedule 2

REPEALS

Amendments made: No. 19, in page 24, line 8, at end insert—

'1968 c. 46.	Health Services and Public Health Act 1968.	Section 63(3).'

No. 30, in page 25, line 14, leave out from beginning to '11' in line 15 and insert 'sections 10 and'.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Mr. Dalyell: The issue that arises is whether the House of Commons is entitled to know the technical, professional, medical advice of the chief medical officer. Understandably, hon. Members want to vote quickly so I shall leave it at that, but surely the House of Commons has a right to know what Sir Donald Acheson, and Dr. Macdonald—or whoever occupies their positions—have to say on contentious issues such as eye testing and dental charges.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 305, Noes 185.

Division No. 261] **[9.55 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. David Lightbown.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCusker, Harold
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen McKay.

PETITION

Mr. Vasili Shipilov

10.6 pm

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): I beg to ask leave to present a petition signed by 250 members and friends of the Heath evangelical church in my constituency.

The petition refers to Vasili Shipilov, who is the subject of early-day motion 796, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe).

Vasili Shipilov is an unofficially ordained orthodox priest in the Soviet Union. He was first detained at the age of 17. He is now aged 65 and has spent 47 of the past 48 years in psychiatric hospitals or prisons. He is still in detention. It is hard to believe that such ghastly treatment can go on for so long.

The petition asks the House to encourage my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary to do all possible to secure Mr. Shipilov's release from detention. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend will readily accept the position. I know that he is aware of Mr. Shipilov's situation and that he will continue to do all possible to press for his release from detention.

I am sure that the petition will find the support of many, if not all, right hon. and hon. Members, and I give it my full support.

To lie upon the Table.

National Health Service (Bradford)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boscawen.]*

10.8 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): I am pleased to have this opportunity to introduce a brief debate on the National Health Service in Bradford. Last December, I was also most grateful to have the opportunity of introducing a debate on poverty in Bradford which showed clearly the direct links between poverty, especially unemployment, large-cale dependence on benefits, poor and over-crowded homes and ill health.

I am sad to say that Bradford has become known as a low pay city by reputation to a large number of people by virtue of the extensive low-pay of people in full-time employment. I am sad to say that Bradford is also a poor-health city. More babies die in Bradford than in most other cities. There is a high incidence of heart disease and illness associated with poverty, particularly tuberculosis and dysentery which, sadly, are commonplace.

There are 25,000 unemployed men and women, and one third of the population depend on benefit. There are so-called poverty zones in Bradford where men, women and children are caught in a vicious spiral of deprivation and decline, producing a sub-culture of alienated and apathetic people who have very little hope for themselves, their families, for others in the community or for the community itself. Above all, those people need worthwhile, well-paid work, job security and confidence to plan for a better future for themselves and their families.

Too many people are trapped in the despair of years of unemployment, desperate hardship and increasingly extensive debt. In many cases their confidence of ever getting a decent job and keeping a decent job with decent pay is shot through. Too many people are fed up with temporary job programmes and training programmes and go back on the dole or to part-time and low-paid work.

If private investment is to come to Bradford, it must be encouraged by public investment being pumped into that city by Government. Sadly I have to report to the House that if all the money available under the latest initiative —the so-called city action programme—were spent in Bradford, it would represent less than £1 per head for every person in the district. The best way to prevent illness in Bradford is to remove or substantially lessen the burden of poverty which grips our city. More work is the key, with more and better homes, better community services and a better community environment.

Earlier this year, Bradford suffered a major blow when Bradford health authority announced NHS cuts of more than £2 million. Last month, that package of cuts was revised downwards to £1·4 million after extensive protests throughout the district. Inevitably, it will affect the standard of patient care and patient services. We are confronted with the closure of a maternity ward at St. Luke's hospital, and the transfer of some family planning services from excellent NHS clinics to general practitioners. We are also confronted with cuts in cancer screening and community nursing and the cancellation of a rheumatology consultant appointment for young disabled people. Fewer people living outside Bradford will be able to receive treatment which traditionally has been available in the city.

[Mr. Max Madden]

All that is to bring the authority into balance next year. The bulk of the cuts are being introduced only for financial reasons, because DHSS Ministers say that the authority is not allowed to go into deficit.

Health authorities are subject to central control and the chairs of regional health authorities are widely perceived as reliable, safe political agents of the Government. Just how that has come about can be seen by the cavalier and the discourteous way in which Mr. Royston Moore, a senior Conservative politician, has been treated. He was the chair of the Bradford health authority for some time and I understand that he was telephoned only days before the March meeting of the health authority and told that he would not be reappointed. He was not even informed who his successor was to be. That is a disgraceful way for such a senior public servant to be treated by the DHSS. Sadly, it has become fashionable for the DHSS and the Government to treat senior public figures in that way.

The Prime Minister, a mother, tells us and the public that the National Health Service is safe in her hands. In that case, how can she stand back and allow a maternity ward in Bradford to close? How can she allow excellent family planning advice to be denied to large numbers of women of all ethnic origins who want that advice to be given by women and who are extremely reluctant to attend male doctors? How can the Prime Minister stand back and allow £1·4 million to be taken away from the NHS in Bradford this year with the possibility of more being taken the year after?

"Grapevine", the official newsletter of the Bradford health authority, had a new year message in January this year under the banner headline:

"A happy new year to all our Readers."

The message from the district general manager, Mr. Mark Baker, said:

"It has been a long hard autumn. Since September we have been trying to wriggle out of our most serious financial crisis ever. In addition to the much publicised ward closures, we have had to stop building programmes, equipment purchase, restrict the use of agencies, save energy, freeze management posts and many other things in order to save money. So far, although we have closed beds, clinical services have largely been spared.

It is not clear yet how badly off financially we will be next year. Indications are that we will start the year with a deficit of at least £1 million despite all our efforts this year, and maybe as high as £2 million.

Managers alone cannot solve the problem, nor is the Government going to change its policies on Health Service funding overnight. If we are to continue developing services, and avoid painful closures, everyone must help. Use up old stocks rather than ordering new; save paper in case notes and in communications, save energy by turning off lights and heaters. Above all, think about the cost of what you do. The simplest of tasks involving machines or other equipment has a cost to it. If everybody helps, jobs and services will be more secure."

That is the reality of the new year message to the staff of Bradford health authority.

I urge the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) to consider a number of positive suggestions that I should like to put to her. They are ways in which the Government could make a direct contribution to relieving the financial pressures of Bradford health authority and which would remove entirely the need for the cuts package this year and the threatened cuts package next year.

First, I understand that the pay award report is with the Prime Minister. I urge the Prime Minister and the Minister to understand that if the pay award is fully funded it will give Bradford an extra £660,000 this year. I hope that the pay recommendations will be accepted in full. A total of 500 staff have been made redundant from Bradford health authority in recent years. In fact, staff morale is so low that a working party has been looking into the reasons for that low morale for some time. In 1987 a report from that working party said:

"The Authority's Working Party on Staff Morale has at several meetings discussed a concern that low pay is contributing to the low morale of certain groups of employees in the Health Service."

That is no surprise because the working party also discussed the pay levels of

"ASC groups 1 and 2, Clerical Officers and Nursing Auxiliaries."

It said:

"For each of these groups average gross earnings were below the EEC 'low pay figure' of £116 per week."

The conclusion of that working party in its report was the following:

"The Authority records its concern about continuing levels of low pay for various pay groups in the NHS, which are felt to contribute to problems of staff morale within the Service, and to difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff."

I say to the Prime Minister and to the hon. Lady who will reply tonight that, if it is seen to be necessary for the Government to give substantial pay increases to judges, the police, the military and others whom they wish to recruit, retain and motivate, it is similarly vital that all those who work in the Health Service should be treated in the same considerate and generous fashion.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, South is very free with her advice. Most of it is met with derision by my constituents. If she really wants to stop people, especially young people, smoking and drinking alcohol, why does she not ban tobacco firms and brewers from advertising their products in sponsoring sporting events? If she really wants to stop taxpayers' money being wasted in the National Health Service, why does she not bring the drugs industry into public ownership?

If the hon. Lady wants to give the Bradford health authority extra money, why does she not exempt the authority from rates, which would give it an extra £1 million this year? I understand that private nursing homes are exempt from rates. Why then is the National Health Service liable to rates? I also suggest, since we shall be debating the poll tax next week, that the NHS should be exempt from the poll tax.

Why are not the Bradford and other NHS authorities throughout the country exempt from water and sewerage charges, which also represent a substantial burden on those authorities at the present time?

Why can the Government not provide extra funding for maternity, family planning, cytology, and community nursing services and a new, urgently needed consultant rheumatologist to deal with the young disabled?

This week's social security cuts add enormously to the poverty in Bradford and will intensify ill-health. Only this week, I was told about a young widow with five children who, as she is in receipt of widowed mother's allowance, is not eligible for free school meals. She will now have to pay an extra £15 a week for the school meals which her five children take each day. There are 9,500 children in Bradford who will lose the right to free school meals as of this week.

Credit must go to the Labour-controlled Bradford council, which has sought to relieve some of the hardship

that the cuts in social security will bring many men, women and children in our city by supplying school milk, which the Government stop them supplying free, at 1p a day, so that it can continue to be given to children under the age of nine at school. The council has also cut the price of school meals to help those who are losing out under the social security cuts.

There is no way that the charities of Bradford or of the rest of the country can replace the DHSS payments that used to be made for all sorts of urgent necessities to very poor people. It is indeed sad that we are this week taking a step back in history into poor relief, with deserving and undeserving poor.

Pensioners resent being told by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South that they should sell their homes so that they can go private. She has conveniently overlooked the fact that, if they sold their houses and acquired more than £6,000 in the process, they would, as a result of her Government's social security changes of this week, lose all rights to benefit.

Many of my constituents do not have one holiday a year, let alone two, and certainly could not provide themselves with sufficient funds to go into private health care by giving up a second holiday. If they have a front room to decorate, certainly forgoing the decoration of that room would not provide them with the funds necessary to go into private health care. The Government need to understand that the people of Bradford depend on the National Health Service. They want more to be spent on improving and expanding the service and on preventive medicine. Bradford's NHS needs extra money which could easily be provided if the Government had the political will, understanding and compassion to do it.

I hope that this short debate will add to the pressures which are being put on the Government by every community for a change of political will and policy. We know that the money is available and that there is no need for cuts in the NHS in Bradford or anywhere else. I look forward, as do the vast majority of my constituents, to a change of policy, more understanding and more compassion from the Government for the real needs of people in Bradford and throughout the country.

10.25 pm

Mr. Pat Wall (Bradford, North): I am pleased to support my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden). Bradford's district health authority covers an area of 54 square miles and is compact and densely populated. The majority of its 350,000 population live within three miles of the city centre. The population is expected to grow by 38,000 by the end of the century. The authority says in its strategic plan for 1987-94 that there is a close correlation between the incidence of illness and social and economic circumstances. It is that fact above all which makes the £2 million cuts outlined by my hon. Friend a central issue.

Of the 17 health districts in the Yorkshire region, Bradford has the second highest incidence of poor housing and the highest incidence of overcrowding. In the social index, Bradford is the worst of the 17 district health authorities. For every 100 middle-aged men who die of heart disease in the rest of the country, 140 die in Bradford. A new-born Bradford girl can expect a life two and half years shorter than her average sister in England and Wales. In inner Bradford, infant mortality is 17 per thousand, compared with a national average of below 10 per thousand. In the Bradford city area, there are over three cases of tuberculosis per thousand; in some areas of the city, there are nearly 10 cases per thousand.

My hon. Friend has listed some of the cuts which must take place to meet the £2 million deficit which the health authority faces. I should like to mention one sphere which he did not take up but which should be close to the heart of the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) —smear testing for cervical cancer. We believe, as I am sure the hon. Lady does, that all women aged 20 to 65 should be tested regularly. A scheme was introduced in Bradford in July 1986, but only for women aged 35 to 64. It will take a further five years to complete the first call-up. The interval between testing and results is seven weeks, and the interval between smears is five years. The cuts mean that the health authority has to make a choice between extending the age range or lowering the interval between tests to three years. Neither funding nor laboratory capacity will allow the health authority to carry out both.

The city of Bradford is proud of its pioneering work in the treatment of cancer by chemotherapy. I have family reasons to be grateful for the developments which have been made in the city. One effect of the cuts is that outsiders will be refused that treatment. In our turn, we will be refused treatment by other health authorities. I have had letters from Manchester university about orthopaedic surgery and from Leeds about the treatment of inflammatory bowel disease.

To conclude, I support the point made by my hon. Friend about the urgent need for the Government to meet the pay needs of nurse and health workers, rather than increase the burden on Bradford health authority. A Government who can afford to give £2 billion in one stroke to the richest 3 per cent. of our population can well afford to meet the needs of health care in the Bradford districts.

10.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mrs. Edwina Currie: I congratulate the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on raising this debate. I am sorry that what he said was such a standard rant, and that he did not find it possible to approve of anything that we are trying to do, unlike his hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Wall) who at least recognised our efforts in relation to cervical cancer.

Indeed, when it comes to prevention, despite the rather unkind remarks from the hon. Member for Bradford, West, it might help if he and his hon. Friend were able to encourage his constituents to take some notice of some of the things that we have been saying. We have strong evidence to show that if people changed their lifestyles some of the problems that have been mentioned, particularly in relation to heart disease, could be reduced.

The hon. Member for Bradford, West put some important points to me. I am shortly to carry out the ministerial review for Yorkshire region, and I will ensure that all of those matters are discussed with those responsible. Not least, I want to raise with Yorkshire regional health authority, and perhaps I can give notice of that to it tonight, the very poor neonatal and infant

[Mrs. Edwina Currie]

mortality figures that hon. Members have mentioned. I share the hon. Gentleman's concern. They were the worst in England in 1986.

I do not think that it is a problem simply associated with the hospitals. The solutions probably lie outside with the family practitioner committees and with the community services; but I intend to get something done about it, for the sake of the women of Bradford and their babies. I will also take up with Yorkshire region the points that have been made about the cervical cancer programme.

There have been significant overall increases in national health funding in this country. We have the second largest programme of expenditure of total Government money after social security. I am sure hon. Gentlemen will note the figures. So far this year, we have about £22 billion to spend. Perhaps after my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has finished her deliberations there will be more than that; we shall have to see.

We allocate our money for hospital and community health services to the regional health authorities. The gross revenue spending of the Yorkshire regional health authority, which is responsible for Bradford, was £583 million in 1982-83. This year it is £851 million. That is a 46 per cent. increase in cash terms and a more than 4 per cent. increase in real terms, which is slightly higher than the national average.

The authorities decide how to allocate the money to the district health authorities. There is not a set formula for doing so. They try to take into account many factors, such as those mentioned by the hon. Gentleman. As a result, Bradford's funding has also increased at this time, with the result that its initial recurrent allocation for this year is nearly £71 million, which includes a development fund of about £500,000. The authority is also to receive substantial additional sums for improving services for specific service developments, £60,000 for AIDS funding, a joint finance allocation of £940,000 and pump-priming funds of £1·5 million spread over three years. To assist the district to develop its community-based mental handicap and mental illness services, there will be about £700,000 in 1988-89. I hope that hon. Gentlemen will agree that those are also important areas, alongside the acute services.

Bradford will also receive £280,000 from the central waiting list initiative, which is a significant amount. It has a substantial cost improvement programme of £2·7 million, or 3·8 per cent. of the revenue budget. It is the highest in the Yorkshire region. £500,000 of that will come from competitive tendering savings, which I am sure hon. Gentlemen will not like, but it is true, and about £1·4 million will come from a recently agreed package of measures, about which hon. Gentlemen have spoken, and which I shall refer to shortly.

Bradford has also appointed a commercial manager with the aim of generating net income of £50,000 in the first year, rising to £120,000 next year. We regard that as a very exciting development. As clause 4 of the Health and Medicines Bill passed without a vote late last night, we hope that we shall make progress on that initiative before very long.

Last year, as has been said, Bradford health authority found itself having to make adjustments for in-year pressures, which amounted to about £400,000. It was helped by the additional funds announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health in December, and Bradford's share was £460,000. That health authority, like all others, has a statutory obligation not to overspend. It is not a question of the Government being unkind to it. We all have a statutory obligation not to overspend, me included.

Clearly, it is prudent against that background at the start of the financial year for the health authority to review budgets in the development programme to ensure that it does not start programmes which it cannot finish or face last-minute adjustments which could be damaging to patient care. Most of all, as it has an ambitious development programme, it is essential to ensure that all developments are affordable.

I understand that various measures taken will not affect patient care, for example, maternity services. Since 1980 two small post-natal wards have been closed at St. Luke's hospital without undue pressure on remaining beds. The birth rate has fallen now, despite the remarks made about the family planning service, and early discharge after delivery is now established good practice. Bradford tells me that it feels able to close a further ward, B3, without in any way compromising patient care. In the event of unexpected demand, additional beds could be reopened at the Royal infirmary maternity unit. The saving on this is £120,000 which is achieved without any loss of quality of care and throughput.

Mr. Madden: Will the Minister confirm that the maternity ward, B3, at St. Luke's was closed in 1987 and had to reopen within 48 hours because of increased need? Will she acknowledge that it is unsatisfactory to centralise maternity services at Bradford Royal infirmary because there are inadequate support services and it is a long distance for many of my female constituents to attend the BRI rather than St. Luke's?

Mrs. Currie: I hope that the hon. Gentlemen will allow me to ensure that those points are considered. When I do the regional reviews I ensure that we have maternity services and care for women firmly on the agenda. I shall ensure that those points are drawn to the attention of the health authority.

The transfer of mental handicap patients from Green Lane hall hospital to Westwood, which was begun in March, is also of some interest. These patients have already moved to substantially upgraded accommodation at Westwood and I think that their quality of life has improved. Again, the change will release £120,000. There are several other similar examples.

There have been substantial improvements in the services, despite what hon. Gentlemen have said. Between 1982 and 1986 the acute in-patient cases treated increased by 13 per cent. to much higher than the England average and day cases increased by 48 per cent. —a growth rate on a par with the rest of the country.

I have mentioned service developments planned for this year. These include the pump-priming projects related to the provision of mental handicap and mental illness services in the community, the opening of two new geriatric wards, staffing for three new mental health centres, medical and surgical equipment, and a range of other developments.

Best of all is the redevelopment of Bradford Royal infirmary and St. Luke's hospital phase 1. Work is planned to start soon at St. Luke's. The total cost will be £33 million. The worst of the existing ward accommodation at St. Luke's will be replaced. The result will be a modernised hospital service in Bradford, caring for its population well into the next century. I hope that hon. Gentlemen will support that scheme and recognise that it is a major replacement of old facilities, many of which have given cause for considerable concern. We are interested to see how that progresses.

On that basis, I hope that hon. Gentlemen will realise that I am interested in what they have said and will ensure that these points are given due attention.

The motion being made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-two minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 15 April 1988

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Pedestrian Crossing (Greenford)

9.35 am

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North):

To the honourable Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the humble petition of the residents of Greenford

in the names of Mrs. Paul of 82 Hicks avenue, Greenford and over 700 other people,

sheweth that there has recently been a fatal accident at the zebra crossing at the junction of Cowgate road and Greenford road and that there have been many other less serious accidents there in recent years.

I worked for two years to establish this crossing and the death of Mrs. Eula Lewis, a popular and respected local figure, who was knocked down by a van, has raised the fears of the community about the inadequacy of the crossing. The need to upgrade it to pelican status, which is what I had always hoped we would have, is now urgent in view of the death of Mrs. Lewis. It is constantly used by local disabled and mentally handicapped people and by mothers and children and others. The proposals by Ealing council to upgrade it are welcome but inadequate. We feel that the crossing——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member should not make a speech.

Mr. Greenway: May I finally say that I hope that the crossing will be upgraded to pelican status and, if necessary, resited in order for that to happen.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House will urge the Secretary of State for Transport to have a pelican crossing installed at this junction and your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Orders of the Day

Scotch Whisky Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 3

INTERPRETATION, ORDERS AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

9.37 am

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 2, line 39 at end insert—

'(c) and in the production of which water of a high quality derived from a Scottish source has been used.'.

There may be some amusement in discussing the Bill, in that the only amendment relates to water and normally we call Scotch whisky usquebagh, the water of life. Most people look upon water as something that they add to their dram, especially those who do not have the courage to drink the golden liquid neat. Experts tell us that in drinking water with whisky we should use separate glasses, one containing whisky and the other containing water, and that alternative sips should be taken. They say that it is sacrilege to add anything to whisky as soon as the bottle has been opened.

The amendment is vital, because the quality of the water used in the production of Scotch whisky is of great significance. The amendment seeks to ensure that the water used in the production is of the highest quality. Right hon. and hon. Members who served on Standing Committee C will recall that I mentioned the effects of afforestation on the quality of the water used in the distillation of Scotch whisky. It will be helpful for other hon. Members to know why I wish to amend the Bill; for that reason, I shall summarise my arguments in support of the amendment.

The quality of the water used in the production of whisky is vital to its distinctive taste. Water is important to the preparation of the maltings—the process by which the barley is taken through various technical processes and then distributed to the distilleries. It is also vital to the mash and the distillation itself. The springs, burns, rivers and lochs of Scotland partially account for the distinctive flavours of the malts and blends that are produced. There is, for example, the peaty flavour of the whiskies produced on the Isle of Isla, of which the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) spoke on Second Reading. There are also the lighter flavour whiskies that are produced in my constituency.

The Scotch Whisky Association has stressed the importance that it attaches to the quality of water. It has produced a booklet about Scotch whisky and question 14 says:

"What gives Scotch Whisky its distinctive flavour and bouquet?"

The answer is clear:

"Water is probably the most important single factor and a source of good, soft water is essential to a distillery."

Question 15 states:

"Why do whiskies produced in different distilleries vary in flavour? . . . Most people would agree that the water used is

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

the decisive factor. Adjoining distilleries which draw their water from different sources are known to produce whiskies that are quite dissimilar in flavour."

Given the number of distilleries that I represent, I believe that I can speak with some authority about the distinctive flavours of whisky. In the Speyside area of my constituency, distilleries stand shoulder to shoulder along the valley of the Spey. Each one, albeit they are only 100 yards apart, produces a malt of a distinctive flavour. When people think of Glenlivet, they do not take into account that various Glenlivets are produced in the braes of Glenlivet. I must confess that my own particular malt whisky comes from that area; I will not tempt the fate of falling out with the many other distilleries in my area by naming that specific one, but it has a distinctive flavour.

Laboratory technicians are employed in all the distilleries, not just to monitor the whisky as it goes through its various processes, but to monitor the quality of the water that is added at the various stages of the process. They have a major responsibility to analyse the quality of the whisky.

It is important to ensure the non-acidity of the water used. I am not a scientist—I did not take science after my second year of senior school; I opted for languages—but I understand enough of the technicalities to appreciate that water is measured by pH factors—pH1 is the most acidic, pH7 is neutral and pH14 is the most alkaline.

In the past few years there has been a great deal of concern about acid rain and its impact on the environment. It has been assumed that acidic rain is caused by the sulphuric emissions of industrial complexes. Recent research has suggested, however, that in Sweden, for example, the high level of afforestation has in some way contributed to the acidity of the rainfall. I have little doubt that substantial afforestation will affect the geochemical content of the water used in the whisky industry. That is especially true of the Dufftown area of my constituency. There is a saying that Rome was founded on seven hills and Dufftown was founded on seven stills. That demonstrates the significance of the whisky industry to that area.

9.45 am

The *Aberdeen Press and Journal* of 9 January stated:

"The pure, sparkling mountain water which helps to make Dufftown one of the main centres of distilling in Scotland could be drastically affected if a new tree planting proposal goes ahead."

That warning came from the director of the north-east river purification board, Mr. Ferris Little. At a meeting with members of the distilling industry in my constituency he explained that, in addition to changing the chemical content of the water, the trees could also take up a significant amount of it, affecting particularly those distilleries that relied on smaller catchments. He gave that warning with his authority as director of the purification board.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The effects of rapid and widespread afforestation on the supply of water to the whisky industry is an important matter. Is the hon. Lady satisfied with the efficacy of the monitoring performed by the purification boards?

Mrs. Ewing: The north-east river purification board has been extremely helpful to the distillers in my area; I can speak only of that board. I am concerned about the general monitoring of the impact of afforestation and I shall pursue that matter in greater detail later.

It is important to stress that the distilleries that I represent do not wish to enter into a conflict with the forestry industry. They do not want to prevent the development and expansion of afforestation. We recognise that forestry plays a vital role in the rural communities of Scotland. Moray is one of the most afforested areas of Scotland and provides a large amount of employment for the area. Anyone passing along a road should realise that most of the telegraph poles are produced from the forests of my constituency. The distillers want to live side by side with forestry, but they ask that no one industry should be expanded at the expense of the other.

We should legislate to ensure that a compromise is reached between the two industries. The distillers of my area have been working extremely hard to reach such a compromise, perhaps because of the implications of the Glen Rinnes afforestation scheme.

The distillers have held meetings and exchanged letters with the Forestry Commission because that commission has a major role to play with regard to private or public afforestation. The Malt Distillers Association of Scotland, which is based in Keith in Banffshire in my constituency, wrote to the Forestry Commission expressing its concern about the matter. A fairly substantial reply—I have sent a copy to the Under-Secretary of State for his information—was received by the association.

Dr. Nisbet of the Forestry Commission said:

"The only way to provide conclusive proof of any association"

between afforestation and the acidity of water

"is to carry out long-term studies monitoring the level of stream acidity before, during and after afforestation."

It may appear that the Forestry Commission has made a major concession and has taken on board the anxieties expressed. We are worried, however, that long-term monitoring may take so long that we shall lose some of our distilleries in the process because their supply of water has been adversely affected.

In reply to that letter the president of the Malt Distillers Association, Mr. McBain of Strathisla distillery of Keith, said:

"It is not very reassuring to be told that in 30 years our fears might be proven right—or wrong, by that time some of our distilleries may be put out of business, but the results of the scientific evidence would be interesting!"

The Scotch whisky industry cannot afford to wait 20 or 30 years for hard scientific evidence to be placed before the House. The local community is concerned because of the significance of the industry for employment opportunities. The Government must also be concerned when one considers just how much the whisky industry of Scotland contributes to the Exchequer. If we were to take whisky revenues away from the Exchequer, it would cause severe financial problems for the country.

Some of that concern has been reflected in comments by members of the district council, which, of course, is the local planning authority. There are no legal requirements for planning permission for afforestation, although the Forestry Commission consults local planning authorities. It is perhaps significant that, in June 1987, the director of planning for Moray district council, Mr. Robert Stewart, referring to Ben Rinnes afforestation, said that there was a need for

"all efforts to safeguard this asset and to reach a satisfactory compromise."

That view has been reflected by other organisations within the constituency, such as the Speyside council of social services, which is directly involved in the community.

We are concerned that the urgency of the matter is not recognised at this stage.

Some distilleries own land on which springs rise and streams flow, but other distilleries do not. Even if they wish to purchase land, there would be complex legal discussions about how it could be done. They face difficulties. I seek a clear message that the House is concerned about the effects of afforestation on the whisky industry's water supply. I ask that the House takes account of the whisky industry's desire to work with forestry. There is a strong case for negotiation and discussion, and there is potential to reach a compromise. It is not our wish in any way to create conflict.

The House should make it clear also to the forestry industry that measures that are not particularly complex or difficult can be taken. For example, we could ensure that planting takes place only a certain distance from any known source of water supplying a distillery. It has been suggested that leaving 30m on either side of a spring, river or burn would be enough to protect the supply. Scientific evidence has been gathered on that point. Indeed, continuous monitoring is taking place. The loss to forestry would be minimal, but maximum security would be offered to the whisky industry. Surely that is what we wish to achieve.

We should not place the whisky industry in a situation in which it will face complex legal wrangles. In the medium term, we can seek legislation and planning controls, but in the long term we may face the loss of our industry. If the forestry industry were to act now, we would save ourselves a great deal of trouble in future. I hope that that message will be accepted in the constructive way in which it is put forward, not only by me but by representatives of the whisky industry in my constituency.

This is a modest amendment. It provides a constructive approach to a major problem and will enable two important industries to live together in co-operation, and provide employment and wealth for local communities. If the amendment is accepted, we shall make it clear to both industries that the House views the matter seriously. By acting now, we can avoid any future destructive or negative conflict.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): The House has listened with great respect and interest to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing). She showed not only concern but considerable expertise and knowledge of the problem to which the amendment refers. I support the hon. Lady's amendment. She recommended a certain method of consumption of water and whisky. The hon. Members for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) and for Glasgow, Central (Mr. McTaggart) will confirm that the part of Glasgow that I represent is not noted for that method of whisky consumption. The tradition is rather more of the half-and-half variety, which is probably not terribly beneficial to health.

Of course, water quality is central to the Scotch whisky industry. There is concern about several environmental effects of certain types of afforestation, notably sitka spruce and Scots pine. The hon. Member for Moray will confirm that she is concerned about those types of afforestation.

This week, I wrote a letter to the chairman of the Forestry Commission, and sent a copy to Lord Sanderson of Bowden, the Minister of State, Scottish Office, about a certain environmental problem that forestry might create in my constituency. The hon. Lady will be reassured to see my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland in the Chamber. He is concerned about the effects of afforestation on water acidity.

We are talking about three problems. There is a qualitative problem, a quantitative problem, and the problem of the effects on such an important industry if the first two problems continue. The qualitative problem is the effect of afforestation on water acidity levels. The quantitative problem is the effect on distilleries that rely on small water catchments and springs. Quality may be unchanged, but, because trees inevitably use considerable amounts of water, the total water supply will be affected. A quality image is crucial to the industry's success. The Scotch whisky industry operates in a hard international commercial world. A continuing problem would be used by the Scotch whisky industry's international competitors.

As the hon. Lady has said, the Forestry Commission has a mechanism for dealing directly with the problem. I agree with the hon. Lady's suggestion in Committee that industry together with land use, recreation, agriculture and so on, should be taken into account in the Forestry Commission's consultative procedures. The traditional method of dealing with developmental and environmental conflicts is the planning system.

In theory, one way of dealing with the problem would be to make developments above a certain size require planning permission before they can go ahead. That may be a blunt weapon, and I suspect that it could not come within the compass of the Bill.

Although there may be technical problems in accepting the hon. Lady's amendment, there will be no dispute that she has raised a most important point. I look forward with great interest to the Minister's reply.

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): I support the amendment. I share the interest of the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) in the main product in her constituency.

Five factors are involved in the production of whisky. The hon. Member for Moray referred to the production of malt whisky in her constituency. That is not specified in the Bill. I shall be grateful for some guidance from the Minister or from the sponsor of the Bill on the reason why there has been no differentiation between the definition of malt whisky and of grain whisky, which is used to make the blends that are drunk in this country.

10 am

Of the five factors, water is the key issue. Peat plays a part, both in the flavour that it imparts to the whisky and in the acidification of the water. It also imparts flavour through the treatment of the barley prior to mashing and distillation.

The cask in which the whisky is matured is important, as minor, or even major, flavour differences can be produced between distilleries that are relatively close geographically, or even within the products of one distillery. Oak casks that have largely been used for the

[Dr. Lewis Moonie]

maturation of sherry before the whisky is laid down—for example, Fino, which is of a relatively light character—can impart the flavour of that sherry into the whisky, which then adopts similar characteristics. If it is an Oloroso, which is a richer sherry, the whisky adopts a richer flavour. I am sure that this is of great interest to the Bill's sponsor, the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), although I understand that he does not drink whisky, or even sherry.

Mr. Bill Walker: It is all the more noble, therefore, that I should sponsor the Bill.

Dr. Moonie: Indeed it is.

The time spent in the cask is crucial. A minimum of three years is specified for grain whisky, but for malt the more usual minimum period before sale is eight years. Some of us are lucky enough to drink malt whisky that has been laid down for 10, 12, 14 or even 18 years——

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Or even 30.

Dr. Moonie: That is very lucky, but perhaps it is getting a little weak by that time.

Those of us who enjoy drinking malt whisky like to do so in the way that was intended—as it comes from the cask, and any water is taken with it, but separately. I suppose that that is a different definition of a "half and half".

The addition of water is important, and the expertise of the stillmen and staff is crucial. It is critical that the water is of a suitable pH balance. I shall refrain from asking the hon. Member for Moray to define pH. Perhaps I shall ask the Minister to do so—although that might not be fair. The pH balance is critical not only because of its effect on the flavour but because of the natural process that involves the breaking down of starches in the grains by enzymes to produce sugars which, in turn, are acted upon by the enzymes in the yeast to produce ethyl alcohol. It is vital to monitor and acidity of the water used because natural reactions take place only within a certain defined pH. Very broadly, that is between about 6·8 and 7·2, the mean natural pH being about 7. Any lower than that, and there is a risk to the enzyme action. That would have a critical effect on the production of whisky. I do not suggest that it would be right to standardise the pH balance by the addition of alkaline such as lime, as that would not enhance the quality of the spirit.

Malt whisky is produced from copper stills whereas stainless stills are generally used for grain whisky. Stainless steel resists chemical attack, but copper does not. Over-acidity of the water used in the production, especially at the temperatures involved, allows copper to leach into the solution and contaminate the spirit.

The amendment is both reasonable and important and should be accepted. It is not simply a matter of local forestry, although I accept that that gives rise to local friction. It is also relevant to the general problem of pollution in our society and the deposition of oxides, sulphur and nitrogen into our water from the production and burning of fossil fuels and the effect of that on the local environment. I commend the amendment and hope that the House will accept it.

Mr. Bill Walker: I congratulate the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) on giving the House an opportunity to debate a vital aspect of the production of Scotch whisky. She will not be surprised to hear that I agree with her, although that is a rare occurrence. That is the marvellous aspect of such a Bill—it unites the Scots in an unusual and unique way.

We share an interest in what happens in our hills and glens. The three industries that are affected—agriculture, forestry and whisky production—are the principal employers throughout the Highlands of Scotland, and each has an interest in the other's activities. Agriculture supplies two of the essential ingredients of whisky—produce that can be turned into oatmeal and put into a form of distillation. That is linked with barley, and at the end of the process there is a splendid product.

Forestry interests are directly linked because the forests have to share the same water courses as the distilleries. It is the effect of forests on the water courses that lies behind the amendment.

I must tell the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) that the differences between various forms of distillation have not been spelt out in the Bill because it is enabling legislation. The details of the processes will be spelt out when the orders are laid before the House. Various aspects will be interesting for some people, and controversial for others. I think that they will be interesting and that common sense will prevail—as it always has in the production of Scotch whisky. It is one reason why Scotch has survived and is the principal export industry of Scotland. There has been common sense in the production, the blending, the bottling and the sale of Scotch whisky throughout the world. The industry exports more in percentage terms than any other industry in the United Kingdom. Would it not be lovely if Britain exported more than 90 per cent. of its car production? Sadly, it does not. However, Scotland exports more than 90 per cent. of its Scotch whisky production, which is a great record.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) rightly said that quality was all-important and referred to the consequences if that was not maintained. He mentioned the effect of water and drew attention to the fact that our honourable Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) was sitting on the Front Bench. Although he will not be speaking in the debate, his constituency has many large forests that affect the water courses that, in turn, affect the quality of the whisky. Therefore, care must be taken in monitoring the quality of the water used in the production of Scotch whisky.

Dr. Godman: On the important question of the supply of fine water to the industry—the hon. Gentleman touched on other industries in the Highlands and Islands, but I think that he is principally concerned with the Highlands—is the hon. Gentleman satisfied that the whisky distilleries are utterly and completely immune to the problems of pollution generated by the burgeoning industry of fish farming? I accept that the average fish farm is sited in a sea loch, but, nevertheless, is he satisfied that the distilleries are immune?

Mr. Walker: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that the important thing is to strike the right balance between what is necessary to have effective and profitable fish farms and what is necessary to ensure that they do not impinge on the water courses in a way that will damage the interests of the distillers and blenders. We must not ignore

the fact that water is used in the blending process, because that is important. If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, he will see that I shall discuss the freshwater laboratory at Pitlochry, which is in my constituency, and the interest that it takes in this matter. I shall link that to other things, so the hon. Gentleman will realise that I am concerned about that aspect. If I inadvertently did not mention the islands, that is not because I do not believe that the whisky industry does not have an interest in the islands. Of course it does; it has many fine distilleries in the islands and some fine malts come from our islands. Anything that I say about the Highlands applies to the islands also.

The hon. Gentleman was right to draw attention to the growth in fish farming. Although he is correct in saying that the bulk of the fish farms are in the sea lochs, it is also true that there are hatcheries further up the streams which could have an impact. That is where the freshwater laboratory's activities are so important.

Other bodies have an interest in what happens in the production of Scotch whisky. The actions of the Forestry Commission have an impact, but we must not ignore the private forests because more and more forests in private hands are being planted. The Forestry Commission must respond not only to the property in its care and stewardship, but must effectively oversee what is going on in the private forests. In that sense, the Scottish Landowners' Federation is an important body. It must be brought into the discussions and consultations, and made aware of the duty and responsibility that everyone has to ensure that they do not damage Scotland's most important export industry.

10.15 am

In terms of supervision and overseeing, the Countryside Commission, which is based at Redgorton in my constituency, also has an important role to play. As the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy said in his speech, we are concerned about the effects of pollution on our atmosphere. We all know that what produce the water with the fine and pure quality and the rare ingredients that make it so valuable and essential as a source in the production of Scotch whisky are the heather and peat of Scotland's mountains and islands. The heather and peat produce a rare water with a distinctive quality and taste which cannot be reproduced artificially. God has created it that way. However, it can be changed substantially by the influence of man. As the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy properly remarked, it is man who changes the atmosphere by burning fossil fuels and other things.

We must be careful that we do not overlook that important aspect. That is why the work that is being done by the freshwater laboratory into acid rain, the acidity of water and the impact that that has is important. Fertilisers, for example, are used on the land. Such things can and will affect the water courses. Therefore, it is important that we recognise that one cannot have pure water and allow man, unfettered, to continue with practices that could damage the quality of the water.

As I mentioned earlier, it is not just at the distillery point that we are concernd with pure water. It is also important for bottling and blending. I cite the example of a plant that is just inside my constituency—the Dewars bottling plant on the outskirts of Perth, which draws its water from the river Almond. It is important that that river is not polluted by practices upstream. It is important that we recognise that it can be affected by forestry and intensive farming.

The high-quality water—that is what the amendment refers to—must be from a Scottish source. I cannot imagine us ever importing water into Scotland because we are rarely short of rainfall and get plenty of snow in the hills and mountains in the winter, which helps to provide a constant flow of water. However, as has been said, it is true that other operations will begin to use water in different ways for other areas of production. Trees were given as an example. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood referred to that. That problem shows how important the amendment is.

However, it is unfortunate that, as tabled, and in the part of the Bill in which it is tabled, I understand that the amendment is likely to be technically defective, but that does not change in any way the fact that it is important. I am sorry that we have been unable to find a way of incorporating it in the Bill because the subject of water is important. As I said earlier, this is an enabling Bill and I hope that, in the future, when it becomes an Act—I certainly hope that it will—and orders are tabled, we shall bear in mind the importance of water. It is because of that that I should like to repeat my thanks to the hon. Member for Moray for tabling the amendment. Her point about planting trees, especially 30 ms from water courses, was important and I hope that it will be kept in mind by the legislators of the future, by Government Departments and all the bodies that I have listed, which have an important part to play.

It is at that time that the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood about planning could well be taken on board. He is right to say that this is not the right Bill for planning matters. However, it is important that we get the balance right in Scotland. It is important that we recognise that although whisky has properly been described as the water of life, the pure Scottish water that goes into the production of whisky should be protected.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will be unable to accept the amendment because of the Government's attitude. I am unable to accept it as it would make the Bill defective, but I support everything that it attempts. The hon. Member for Moray has heard my views and those of the other hon. Members who have spoken. Although my hon. Friend the Minister has yet to speak, I hope that he will be as supportive as the rest of us, and I look forward to hearing him.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Donald Thompson): I am delighted that we have reached this stage of the Bill with such accord. As the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) said, Scotch whisky is not a game; it is hard commerce. Scotch whisky competes with what the Scots would say are inferior brands of spirit, such as champagne, port and sherry, which are protected fiercely by their nations.

The Bill is about the ingredients of whisky. The main ingredient is water. I agree with the hon. Lady that I would rather have my whisky in one glass and my water in another than both in the same glass.

It is a remarkable Bill that unites all parts of the House —teetotallers and whisky drinkers from Scotland—and it

[Mr. Donald Thompson]

is a paradox and oddity of this place that I, a Yorkshireman, represent the Government today. I am going to Scotland on 22 July, and it is a red-letter day when I go there because usually it is a pleasant occasion. I am going on behalf of my party, but I am sure that I shall be cheered through the streets and that the Opposition will garland my way simply because of this Bill. But do not worry, I shall not tempt fate.

When I am there I shall see again the lovely forests of Scotland. Do protect them. All the forests that we had in Yorkshire are now moors. We chopped the forests down a hundred years ago to weave a bit of cloth, and they will never come back. Indeed, conservationists would say that they should never come back. Perhaps the conservationists are all less than 150 years old.

I am glad to see my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland sitting on the Bench. We have discussed the amendment and he is here to listen to the debate. When I was a Whip I used to tell hon. Members not to listen to debates because they might be swayed by the arguments. Now that I am a Minister I find that what I said was true. The points in today's debate have been clearly put.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood made a helpful speech and pointed out the importance of the quality of whisky, as did many others. The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) first asked about a separate definition of malt whisky, and I have noted what he said about deliberately defining malt whisky as against Scotch whisky and the distinctive blends of whisky, all of which are precious. Each little blend is, as they would say down here, an export earner on its own, and that is as it should be. Eighteen-year-old whisky is extremely important. When the order is made under clause 3(1) we shall consult as widely as possible so that we know the wishes of the industry and all hon. Members who so ably represent it. Then we can see whether there is a strong will and wish to define malt whisky separately from blended whisky.

When I say "we," I emphasise that we, the Government, will support this private Member's Bill when it becomes law even more strongly than we have done so far. We recognise that it is a strong Bill. I have already given promises of consultation, and I renew them on that specific point today. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman was clever enough to raise it on this amendment.

The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy went on to talk about pollution other than that from afforestation. Since the Clean Air Acts, the countryside and the towns have been hugely cleaned up. Before those Acts the moors in Yorkshire and the forests throughout the country were affected by coal pollution such as we can no longer remember. That does not mean that I agree with the hon. Gentleman or that we should not be diligent. The Clean Air Acts, together with small-bore central heating, have made habitable many houses in Scotland that were remote and too large to heat and live in. On the moors the environment was also dirty. Those two factors are bringing people back to such houses. We must ensure that the environment is clean. My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), with his vast knowledge of the Bill, can perhaps speak more authoritatively on this part which deals with water, although he has done well on the rest.

Dr. Godman: I do not wish to be unnecessarily alarmist, but I wish to ask the Minister the question that I put to the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker): is his Department and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland satisfied that the problems of pollution emanating from fish farms have no effect on the water supply to the Scotch whisky industry, both distilling and blending?

Mr. Thompson: I will not invent an answer to that question. It would be discourteous and needless. To be honest, I have no knowledge that such pollution is affecting the Scotch whisky industry. I undertake, together with my Scottish colleague, to look into that specific question, and we shall come back to the hon. Gentleman on it.

It is right that we should balance the competing needs of forestry, fish farming, deer farming, intensive farming and sheep farming. Even through the grazing of sheep water courses can be polluted, and, indeed, that is happening in some parts of southern England. We must watch that all the time.

There are always planning conflicts. My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North and the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy find it difficult to imagine importing water. I always ask for Highland Spring. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] If some of my hon. Friends involved in the milk industry were present, they would tell me that I pay more for a pint of Highland Spring than for a pint of milk and that it ain't fair. So I should not be too sure of what we shall see in future. My constituency used to export water to make beer.

The hon. Member for Moray knows that we have been in correspondence with the Scottish Office. There is a legend in England that it is possible to walk from one end of Scotland to the other on the tops of the new electronics factories which fill all the glens and valleys, and that there is so much inward investment that it is hard to find a proper old Scotsman any more because the new technocrats have wandered in. If that is true, I hope that one of them will supply the Scottish Office with a proper duplicating machine, because the standard of duplicating of this letter is similar to what one saw at the age of 15 when some little lad shoved a bit of paper at one.

10.30 am

Nevertheless, if you will bear with me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall read from the letter, because it is important, and I take the amendment very seriously. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and I have discussed it, and he is here to see what can be done.

In my letter, I said:

> "I know that you are very aware of this issue. Indeed, I understand that both the Malt Distillers of Scotland and United Distillers Group have raised this issue with your department. You will be well aware of the importance which they attach to this matter."

I shall be reading extensively from the letter, but some of it may not be verbatim. Parliamentary terms allow me to miss pieces out, but I am not trying in any way to mislead the House or the hon. Member for Moray. At some later date, the hon. Lady may obtain a copy for her further information, and she will see that I have no intention of misleading anyone.

The letter to me said:

"I am enclosing copies of recent correspondence between the Forestry Commission and the Malt Distillers' Association of Scotland concerning in particular the proposed afforestation at Glenrinnes on Speyside."

This appears to have been copied for the hon. Lady, so I assume that she has seen it.

The letter continues:

"You will see from the Commission's letter that the fundamental thesis that coniferous afforestation inevitably leads to acidification of the burns and rivers which run through the plantation is not proven scientifically."

I took the hon. Lady's point that if we wait for scientific proof, we may find that we have waited too long—the thing may have rotted on the day that the litmus paper turns a colour that we do not want.

"Dr. Nisbet was not so uncharitable as to point out also that the Association has not presented any evidence to support their assertions, nor does it appear that the distilleries have records of water quality in the past which could be used to monitor any changes in the future."

That is all fair enough. We could have argued in Committee that the association had better start keeping such records on 16 April, which would at least provide a base line from which we could work. Doubtless, however, those fears should be taken seriously, and indeed they are being.

"In the situation where we cannot state categorically that afforestation will or will not result in adverse effects on water quality although the Forestry Commission take the view that in general this is unlikely the distillers have been presented with the option of 'sterilising' whatever area of land surrounding watercourses they consider is necessary by entering into voluntary agreements with landowners, so that such areas will not be planted with trees."

I also understand the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North that not only the Forestry Commission, but the private foresters who seem to appear so often in the tabloids nowadays, need to be persuaded.

"Until such time as we have firm scientific evidence that there is a problem or likely to be one in future it would not be justifiable to take action to prevent afforestation taking place, given the Government's clear policy of encouraging the expansion of forestry (and indeed Mrs. Ewing has acknowledged the economic significance of forestry in the area)."

Every hon. Member who has spoken in the debate—and I am sure that my Scottish colleagues are listening—has asked for a balance so that we do not kill off one with the other. It would be ridiculous to do so.

The hon. Member for Moray also raised the question of water quantity. The letter says:

"Studies suggest that mature trees may take up more of the rainfall than say grassland, but perhaps not much more than heather and bracken covered moorland. The Forestry Commission estimate the proportion might be of the order of a one to two per cent. reduction in the overall yield of water supply for each 10 per cent. of a catchment (assuming it was formerly grassland) that is afforested. In the unlikely event of 100 per cent. afforestation of such a catchment area the result would be, at the extreme, a reduction of 20 per cent. and more likely 10 per cent. There could only be a problem if a distillery were using a surprisingly large proportion of the water in a particular burn, and in any case there are of course significant variations in the rainfall from year to year."

The hon. Member for Moray mentioned such problems in her opening speech, and she is obviously well aware of the problem, as are other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North. That factor must be taken into account in balance with all the others. I agree with the hon. Lady that the Exchequer cannot do without the cash, nor does it wish to—and I do not want to do without the whisky.

"It follows from the foregoing that the nature of the consultative procedures followed by the Forestry Commission in considering applications for planting grants is not really an issue in this matter. In accordance with the normal consultation procedures for developments of this kind, the Forestry Commission invited views on the proposal from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland, the Red Deer Commission and Moray District Council, as the local planning authority. After undertaking extensive local consultations, Moray District Council relayed the concerns of the distillers. As a result of these representations several meetings were held involving all the interested parties, including the distillers. Agreement was finally reached that the application should proceed on the undertaking that the owners left unplanted until the end of 1987 the areas of immediate concern. This was done to allow the distillers time to consider a number of possible avenues open to them. These included the outright purchase of the area or taking an option to purchase the area at some future date after they had been planted and the effects assessed. I understand that some at least of the distillers concerned have now reached an agreement with the owners.

I was interested by the hon. Lady's suggestion—taken up by others—of a "cordon sanitaire" in the form of a 30-ft gap on either side of the streams, and I hope that it will be noted more widely. There is increasing pressure for access to our woodlands, and such a strip would help, having a dual purpose.

"In the particular case of the Chivas Brothers Distillery it was orginally claimed that Allt-a-Bhainne would close if the scheme were to go ahead. However, 12 years ago the company negotiated a 'sterilisation' agreement with the Glenrinnes Estate in order to protect the water supply. The area covered by this agreement has been excluded from the planting scheme. As Mrs. Ewing acknowledged at Committee stage, research is currently proceeding into the possible connection between afforestation and increased acidification of water. The only way to provide conclusive proof of any association is to carry out long-term studies monitoring the level of acidity before, during and after afforestation and a number of such studies are currently being undertaken by various bodies including the Forestry Commission. Although it is early days these studies have not so far revealed any significant increase in acidity or aluminium resulting from afforestation."

Dr. Godman: Much of the research is financed by the state. Will the Minister give us an assurance that the Government have no intention of reducing the state finance that is given to those bodies to carry out their research?

Mr. Thompson: The research is, of course, peculiarly Scottish. This year, we are spending £193 million on research and development in agriculture and food, and we do not intend significantly to reduce that amount in cash terms in the years to come. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland will have taken on board the important point made about research. It must be monitored constantly so that we may be alerted quickly if something is discovered.

The letter continues:

"The consultation procedures followed in the Glen rinnes case did allow the distillers to make known their concerns over water quality. Provision was made for distillers to buy the parts of the estate which they considered should be kept free of trees in order to protect their water supplies and several distillers appear to have done this. It is not reasonable to expect the Forestry Commission to impose on applicants a restriction on planting trees within 30 metres of a watercourse in the complete absence of any evidence to suggest that this is either necessary or helpful."

Having thought further about the matter, I believe that the Forestry Comission should reconsider its position. I

[Mr. Thompson]

agree that it is unreasonable to impose such a restriction on the commission, but there are many environmental as well as scientific reasons why such action may be sensible.

Although I understand the anxiety of the hon. Member for Moray about the possible effect of afforestation in Scotland on the quality of water used by Scotch whisky distillers, I cannot accept the amendment. My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North also mentioned technical difficulties. As it stands, the amendment would require Scottish water to be used for any whisky, including Irish whiskey. That may mean a huge increase in the export of spring water, but I do not intend to tangle with the Irish on what water they should drink.

The hon. Member for Moray wishes to preserve the quality of the water used in the distillation of Scotch from any adverse effects of afforestation. She will accept that the Bill is not the appropriate place for considering restrictions on afforestation proposals. But, as I said in Committee, I understand her anxiety and have drawn it to the attention of my Scottish colleagues. I read long extracts from the letter so that we may be clear about their reaction. They have made it clear to me that, in most cases, distilleries have made, or will be able to make, arrangements to safeguard their water supplies. In addition, developments in forestry techniques should help considerably to reduce the effects on local waters. But we have not yet received any firm scientific evidence linking afforestation adversely with the water supplies of the surrounding area. That does not mean that we should stop looking.

This important issue is subject to a monitoring programme which so far has produced no support for those fears. None the less, the Government recognise that such fears must be taken seriously and studies are continuing so that the Government can be kept abreast of any changes. I assure the hon. Member for Moray that I have paid close attention to the points that she has made, as have Scottish colleagues. With my assurance that the Government take the subject as seriously as she does, I hope that the hon. Lady will withdraw the amendment.

10.45 am

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: I put on the record how helpful and courteous the Parliamentary Secretary has been to me since I raised the issue with him. It is much appreciated by the representatives of the whisky industry in my area. I also thank those hon. Members who spoke in support of the amendment.

We shall have to do some more hard work on monitoring. The Forestry Commission believes that it is difficult to prove a link scientifically and that it will be a long-term matter. I emphasise the need to ensure that we do not wait too long and lose the whisky industry in the process. The distilleries are undertaking limited research in conjunction with local organisations, and I am sure that they will be happy to share any information with the Ministry. I shall take that message back to them. Aberdeen university is helping to conduct such a survey. Limited information is already available, and now that the matter has been put on record in Committee and on the Floor of the House, I hope that that information will go back and forth between the Departments involved and the distilleries to ensure that we can take action when it becomes necessary.

The Parliamentary Secretary mentioned some of the local issues in my constituency. During the Easter recess, I asked some members of the industry for their views on the current position. They accept that the concessions made on the Ben Rinnes afforestation were helpful. Chivas Brothers Ltd. is the company that owns Allt'a Bhainne distillery. Some time ago, it purchased the land that protects its springs, but the company is worried that many other distilleries are not in that fortunate position. The companies are meeting regularly through the association to ensure that distilleries are offered advice by those who have taken similar steps to protect their livelihoods.

Worries remain about the acidity of the water. The issue will not go away soon. If the whisky industry—I can speak only for my area, which has the lion's share of the industry—continues to be dissatisfied about any matter, we will no doubt be able to rectify it in the orders that will be laid following the enactment of the Bill.

Dr. Godman: Will the hon. Lady clear up the confusion in my mind about the so-called cordon sanitaire? Is it proposed to be 30 m, or, as the Minister said, 30 ft.?

Mrs. Ewing: I thank the hon. Gentleman for reminding me of that point. The Parliamentary Secretary said 30 ft. instead of 30 m, which is the distance that has been suggested. That may not be a perfect measurement, but at least it is a step in the right direction. I appreciate the voluntary agreements that are being reached with landlords to observe this requirement.

I am glad that so many right hon. and hon. Members have understood this vital issue. I thank the Parliamentary Secretary for his helpful attitude and the representatives of the Scottish Office who have attended today. I shall keep the matter before me in the months and years ahead. When the Parliamentary Secretary visits Scotland on 22 July, I hope that he will visit Moray, where he is assured of a warm welcome. He could have fruitful discussions with the representatives of the industry in my area, and I should be happy to organise it for him. He may even be given a golden dram at the end of those discussions.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

10.50 am

Mr. Bill Walker: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

This is an appropriate time to place on record my thanks to hon. Members, particularly those who served on the Committee, for their support and work that they have done to get the Bill to this stage. I should also like to place on record my thanks to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench, their civil servants and the Clerks of the House, who have been so helpful with the Bill and to the Scotch Whisky Association for its briefing material, guidance and the help that it gave me and other hon. Members.

It is important to get the Bill on the statute book because, as I said on Second Reading, the industry is important to Scottish industry. It employs 16,000 people and has a long history of good industrial relations. Its exports amount to £1,000 million a year and the taxes that it pays to the Exchequer in excise duties and other taxes amount to a further £1,000 million. My hon. Friend the Minister said that the Government did not intend to reduce that level of revenue.

It is an appropriate time to say that we in Scotland appreciate the fact that in his recent Budget the Chancellor understood the problems of the Scotch whisky industry —the differentials that exist in the different liquors on the market. He has recognised those problems in the past two Budgets and has not increased the tax on Scotch whisky. That is appreciated by all those who have an interest in the industry, not least the 16,000 people who work in it.

There is now a new and interesting era in taxation. Many new mixed drinks are coming on to the market that have different basic alcoholic contents, be they based on vodka, whisky or whatever. Perhaps the time has come for charges by the Revenue to be based on alcoholic strength rather than the alcoholic-spirit content. It should be based on the alcoholic content of the drink rather than the amount of whisky when it is a minor ingredient. In Scotland, we are experimenting substantially and using whisky in all sorts of liqueurs. It is important that the Government accept and recognise the changes that are taking place.

I was interested to note some recent figures showing —all Scots must be pleased about this matter—that exports of bottled-in-Scotland brands have increased substantially. That is encouraging because it means that the bottling and blending plants, where many of those 16,000 employees work, have seen their share of the market increase.

We must always keep in mind the commercial considerations that affect the range of activities of the Scotch whisky industry. Some people should like to place restrictions on the way in which Scotch is sold, whether it be in bottles or in bulk. It is important to recognise the fact that if Scotch is to maintain and improve its share of the world market—that is the intention of the Bill—commercial considerations must always be firmly in the forefront of everyone's thinking. Hon. Members must not attempt to second-guess the commercial considerations that are taken into account as Scotch continues to maintain its share and penetrate world markets. World markets are constantly changing and presenting new challenges to exporters.

Those of us who take an interest in the Scotch whisky industry are sad that in recent times it has been substantially dominated by the Guinness saga. I do not wish to make any comment about that matter other than to say that Guinness is not the only company that employs people in the whisky industry. There are many fine firms that are managed extremely well by competent, capable and caring individuals, which is why the industry is the premier exporter in Scotland. The combination of good, efficient, effective and caring management and the good, sensible industrial practices of the trade unions is an example to almost every other industry in the United Kingdom. That is why the Scotch whisky industry has maintained its premier position.

There is no question but that hon. Members are united in their support of the Scotch whisky industry. That support has led to Scottish Members being present on a Friday, when normally we would all be leaving for our constituencies.

It is important that hon. Members understand what motivated me to introduce the Bill. When I was fortunate enough to come second in the ballot for private Member's Bills, I was exposed, as are all hon. Members, to all sorts of temptations. People told me of the Bills that they wanted to put on the statute book, but I was determined that whatever I did would be good for Scotland, my constituents and myself. Although I do not drink whisky, I have benefited from the massive amount of taxes that are paid by people who do, and I am sure that many hon. Members in different ways, contribute in that regard. That is why I had no hesitation in bringing forward the Bill.

As I said, the Bill is good for Scotland, my constituents and myself, but, most important, it does something that does not happen enough in Scotland—it unites us in common interests. We live in one of the most beautiful countries in the world. The quality of life in Scotland is better than in any part of the United Kingdom, which is why tourism is such an important industry. I mention the tourist industry because we do not want it or any other industry to impinge on what happens in the Scotch whisky industry. It must be recognised that while it is important that people can and do visit distilleries—they are interesting places to visit—it is equally important that it is understood that the Scotch whisky industry is vital to the well-being of every Scot and everyone in the United Kingdom. It makes a massive contribution to jobs and taxes.

That is why, when I was fortunate enough to come second in the ballot, I decided to introduce the Bill. I am pleased to say that there was no shortage of volunteers to be sponsors of the Bill—to them I say, thank you—nor was there a shortage of volunteers to serve on the Committee. The Bill must almost be unique in that the only hon. Member to have minor reservations is the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). We understood his reservations because of his constituency interest, but he contributed positively to the good-natured and reasoned debates in Committee. I thank the hon. Gentleman. It was important that the views of the companies in his constituency and others were properly considered. I was pleased with the pledges on consultation given by my hon. Friend the Minister. The legislation will give Ministers the power to bring forward orders and it is then that these matters must be properly discussed.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comment about my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). My hon. Friend has been unavoidably detained elsewhere but, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said, he supported the Bill in principle.

Mr. Walker: I thank the hon. Gentleman; I was about to allude to that point. The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley made it known to me in plenty of time that, regrettably, other parliamentary duties kept him away today. I do not wish anyone to think that I have not properly considered that information. We conducted all our negotiations and discussions on the Bill on that basis. Sometimes I wish that we could do so in every matter, as it would make for a more pleasant life for all of us.

The Bill's objectives are, basically, to prevent the production in Scotland of whisky other than Scotch whisky, to prevent the sale anywhere in Great Britain as Scotch whisky of any spirits that do not meet the definition of Scotch whisky and to enable Ministers to set a minimum alcoholic strength for Scotch whisky at some future date as well as to lay down other parameters through Orders in Council. All three aspects will be enforced by civil remedies. We discussed this matter in Committee and

[Mr. Walker]

outside and many useful constructive meetings helped to clarify points. We decided that civil remedies were the way to deal with any transgression.

The impetus of the Bill was a proposal for an EEC Council regulation which will contain a definition of whisky within Europe. That definition could be less rigorous than the current United Kingdom definition in the Finance Act 1969. We were afraid that this more relaxed definition could provide the opportunity for the emergence of a lower quality whisky industry in Scotland and products that could be marketed as "Whisky Product of Scotland". The Bill ensures that it will not be possible to produce "Whisky Product of Scotland" and market it in such a way that it could be confused with or be thought to be Scotch whisky. Because of the premier importance and quality of Scotch whisky it had to be protected. It would be damaging to Scotch whisky if any whisky exports or sales in the United Kingdom reduced its quality image.

When the Bill is passed, all whisky products will have to satisfy requirements set down in subordinate legislation. The Bill provides that any whisky produced in Scotland other than Scotch whisky will be liable to be forfeited. In addition, the Bill provides that Scotch whisky producers or their organisations may apply to the Scottish courts for an interdict prohibiting other producers of Scotch whisky in Scotland from continuing to produce such whisky.

The Bill was designed also to protect the name "Scotch whisky". The Bill makes it unlawful to sell as Scotch whisky any spirits that do not meet the requirements for Scotch whisky laid down in subordinate legislation. As such sales would take place throughout Great Britain, the Bill provides for enforcement by interdict in Scotland and by injunction in England and Wales. That would be done on the application of a Scotch whisky producer or an association of Scotch whisky producers.

These restrictions on sales will apply also to Scotch whisky below an alcoholic strength, which will be specified at a later date in the subordinate legislation as and when Ministers decide that it is an appropriate time to bring forward such measures. The Bill does not specify a minimum alcoholic strength—there has been some confusion about this point—because full consultation with all interested parties will be required before an appropriate level can be determined. I was pleased that my hon. Friend the Minister alluded to this a number of times. We had many interesting talks on this issue because it seemed to be one matter on which there might be differences of view and some controversy, but I am pleased that we finally reached agreement in Committee.

The definitions in the Bill include the definition of whisky. That definition is based on the projected Euro-whisky definition. The amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) would have been tagged on to the end of that definition, but it could not be accepted, as my hon. Friend the Minister said. The Bill provides for the definition to be amended by subordinate legislation. It is necessary to allow the definition accurately to reflect the final text agreed in Brussels without requiring other primary legislation, which would be wasteful of parliamentary time. An important ingredient in the Bill is the flexibility that it gives Ministers when Brussels determines its definition of Euro-whisky.

The Bill applies to England, Scotland and Wales but does not extend to Northern Ireland. As we said in Committee, the corresponding legislation for Northern Ireland can be made by Order in Council under the Northern Ireland Act 1974. The House will be pleased to note that the Bill has no public expenditure or Civil Service manpower implications, apart from the fact that it protects a source of revenue for the Treasury, and I hope for that reason that some day recognition is given to all of us who served on the Committee.

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): My hon. Friend said that he felt it appropriate that the Bill should provide only for civil remedies and not for criminal remedies, but he did not expand on why he thought that way. I am sorry that I was not present during the Second Reading debate, but will my hon. Friend explain why he feels that mere civil action is adequate?

Mr. Walker: After consultation with the relevant Government Departments on the problems and complications which could be involved in criminal proceedings, it was felt that the right way to proceed was for the aggrieved parties—the whisky producers—to bring forward measures to deal with what aggrieved them. That was felt to be a much more satisfactory method than criminal action. It meant that frivolous or silly matters would not take up the time of the courts. Having discussed the matter at some length with all the interested parties and Government Departments, we were confident that this would be an effective measure. The whisky associations and the industry were satisfied with it. I hope that that satisfies my hon. Friend's point.

Clause 1 is central to the Bill as it prohibits the production or keeping for maturation in Scotland of whisky other than Scotch whisky. The definitions of whisky and of Scotch whisky are provided in clause 3. The intention is to prevent the erosion of the quality image of Scotch by lower quality whiskies produced in Scotland, causing consumer confusion both at home and overseas.

The enforcement of the measures would be through civil actions by Scotch whisky producers or an association of Scotch whisky producers such as the Scotch Whisky Association. In addition, any whisky produced in contravention of the clause would be liable to forfeiture by Customs and Excise.

It was important on Second Reading and in Committee that we understood exactly what we were talking about. A definition of this lovely product is contained in the splendid red book of questions and answers that we have all been given by the Scotch Whisky Association. Frankly, I find that book fascinating; it has told me things that I simply did not know before. It says:

> "Scotch whisky means whisky distilled and matured in Scotland. Whisky is distilled in Scotland from barley in pot stills and from malted and unmalted barley or other cereals in patent stills. The well known brands of Scotch whiskies are blends of a number of pot still and patent still whiskies."

It was important that those of us involved understood that.

There has been some talk about the difference between Scotch whisky and other whiskies, particularly Irish whiskey. In this Bill we are not concerned about what happens in the production of other whiskies throughout the world, but we need to recognise that it is the difference between Scotch and those other whiskies that is so important. As I understand it, it is different on the palate

and in its smell and taste, and we need to protect that difference for the benefit of the consumer. It is important to maintain the unique character of Scotch, and that is why we needed to spell out clearly what we were doing.

How do we go about making Scotch whisky? Malt whisky is made by malting, mashing, fermentation and distillation, and I am told that malt whisky is distilled twice. During my inquiries and investigations I discovered many facts about the production of Scotch whisky that were completely new to me. For example, I never understood why it was so important to mature whisky in wooden casks and why the wood had to come from abroad. Charring is equally important because it ensures that the whisky is produced in its final form in the manner that makes it so enjoyable to the consumer.

All that was new to me, and I was very pleased when I was given the opportunity to go to the laboratories at Menstrie because there I learned one aspect of whisky production that I had not previously understood. I had always assumed, in my ignorance, that all that happened when water was added to whisky was that the minimum alcoholic strength was reduced. I thought that the whisky did not change. It was only after my visit to the laboratories that I realised that filtration is a critical part of the process. If one adds more water during filtration some of the important ingredients produced by putting the malt into the charred casks are removed, which substantially changes the taste and quality of the product. It was important that I should understand that as promoter of the Bill and it was essential that the members of the Committee also understood it quite clearly. We may discuss the matter at some length when we get round to the legislation that will follow from the Bill, and I look forward to that. However, while we are not laying down a minimum alcoholic strength and have no intention of doing so, and while there will be full and proper consultation, it is important to get rid of the myth that if one adds water one does not change the whisky. Adding water in the blending and the bottling process does, indeed, change the whisky. Those who argue, "It is the same whisky with some water added", are wrong.

If one gets a glass of whisky in a pub and adds water to it, it may be the same whisky. It will not be going through filtration—unless filtration takes place in one's kidneys, at which point the benefits of the whisky will have been absorbed. I am a bit of an amateur in these matters as I have no first-hand experience. I have had to rely on the advice of my colleagues who helped me in Committee, and there is no shortage of such advice. Indeed, I was somewhat astonished at the depth of knowledge displayed by hon. Members in Committee.

Clause 1(2) deals with a Scotch whisky producer or an association of Scotch whisky producers taking the matter to court if it is felt that the provisions have been contravened.

Clause 1(3) provides that any whisky produced and kept for maturation in contravention of subsection (1) shall be liable to forfeiture. We felt that that was important because we did not want whisky produced in contravention of the subsection to be slipped into the market place at a later date.

The general purpose of clause 2 is to prevent the sale of spirits as Scotch whisky if they do not meet the requirements for Scotch whisky laid down by order under clause 3——

Mr. Greg Knight: Perhaps my hon. Friend can answer two questions. First, why has it been deemed necessary to restrict those who can apply to the court to

"any person carrying on the business of producing Scotch whisky or . . . appearing to the court to be representative of any group of such persons".

Surely, the aggrieved person could be the customer. The customer asking for a Scotch whisky who finds himself given an inferior product may feel aggrieved and may wish to take the licensee to court. Why should not the customer have the right to bring proceedings?

Secondly, to satisfy my curiosity, could my hon. Friend tell the House what tartan he is wearing?

Mr. Walker: I shall certainly do that.

My hon. Friend has asked an interesting question and for once I feel competent to answer. Because of my lack of first-hand knowledge of the product I have not always felt so competent. My hon. Friend is probably aware that before coming to the House I ran a group of department stores and I therefore know something about consumers and their rights. Legislation already provides adequate protection for any consumer who buys any product and feels aggrieved. There is adequate protection in consumer legislation for individuals who believe that they have bought a product that is not fit for the use and purpose for which they bought it. That is the answer to my hon. Friend's first point.

In answer to his second question, I should explain that my full name is William Connell Walker. The clan Connell is part of the MacDonnells of Glengarry. The tartan that I am wearing today is the MacDonnell of Glengarry hunting tartan. I feel that the hunting tartan is appropriate to one of my disposition, as I usually seem to be trying to locate some prey or other. We have had some good-humoured debates about Scottish affairs and about Scots. I have no difficulty in wearing the kilt and showing my allegiance to Scotland as for many hundreds of years all my forebears have been Scots. Occasionally one is accused of not speaking for Scotland, but I hope that it will be accepted that even though I do not agree with some people on some matters we are all entitled to speak for Scotland as a result of our common heritage.

Clause 3 defines the terms used in the Bill, including the definition of Scotch whisky. As a contravention of clause 1 can take place only in Scotland, clause 3(1) defines "the court" as the Court of Session—the equivalent of the High Court in England and Wales, which is included with the Court of Session for the purposes of clause 2. Subsection (1) also defines "Ministers" as including the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. My hon. and very helpful Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, who is present today, has come in for many interesting comments, all constructive and helpful, some extremely humourous, but all highly appreciative of the help that he has given all of us during the passage of the Bill. Clause 3(1) also defines "sell" in the terms commonly used for food legislation.

Subsection (2) empowers Ministers to amend the definition by order. This is important as the text of the proposed EEC spirits regulations has been finalised and the definition in the Bill will need to be amended to reflect any changes in the final text. If that were not possible by order, primary legislation would be required.

Clause 5 states:

"This Act may be cited as the Scotch Whisky Act 1988."

There was a period in my parliamentary career when my interest in aviation and airports led some of my colleagues

[Mr. Walker]

to describe me as "Airports Bill". I hope that they will decide in future that I would be more appropriately known as "Scotch Whisky Bill." That would certainly help me in my constituency, which is always a matter of concern for every constituency Member.

As for my motive in introducing the Bill, when I was first adopted as parliamentary candidate for the constituency of Perth and East Perthshire, as it was then called, one of my first visits was to the whisky firms in the area because I had heard that they were extremely good employers and there was clear evidence that they had been great benefactors to Perth in the past. The very fine company of Arthur Bell and Sons contributed handsomely to the setting up of the Gannochie trust which is responsible for many leisure and recreation failities and the theatre that Perth city enjoys. That is the history and background of the firms in my constituency. Other hon. Members will be able to speak of those in their constituencies. That is why the Bill is so important to all of us. When I called on those companies I found that they were good employers with good industrial relations, and, although people might move between firms, it was rare for them to leave the industry, and most stayed throughout their working lives.

Another interesting factor was the level of motivation and the startlingly high level of management skills and practices, especially at Arthur Bell and Sons at that time. I put that down to the fact that Bell's was then led and managed by Mr. Raymond Miguel, who is a remarkable man. Since losing control of Bell's—I shall not comment on that as the matter is under investigation—he has again established himself in the city of Perth. I draw attention to this because he is setting the kind of example that the whisky industry has set for Scotland in the past by keeping its head offices in Scotland. Mr. Miguel is now with the Bellhaven company and has again established his central office in Perth.

One of the real lessons of recent times is that if we Scots are to protect our Scottish interests in the way that we are all doing collectively today, we must ensure that business people in Scotland maintain their Scottish dimension and Scottish interests. Sadly, in recent times, certain Scottish financial interests have not practised what some of them preach and have not supported indigenous Scots industry as they should. I hope that what we are doing for the whisky industry today will be appreciated by all with an interest in Scotland and that they will ensure that the offices and management and, so far as possible, the control, is maintained in a Scottish dimension. The Scotch whisky industry is so important to the people of Scotland, to the Treasury and to the 16,000 people who work in the industry that the Bill, as amended in Committee, should be allowed today to move on to another place and to make further progress.

I conclude my remarks at this point. Later, with the leave of the House, I may seek to respond to any comments made by hon. Members.

11.28 am

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) on his initiative in bringing in the Bill. As he said, it has all-party support. The hon. Gentleman deserves our thanks for that.

The hon. Gentleman's feats are legion. Previously he has been described as Scottish defence spokesman, as well as father confessor to the Prime Minister. Who knows what other roles lie ahead? For me, however, he will be known affectionately from now on as a "golden oldie" as he has done such a good service to my constituents by introducing the Bill. More than 2,000 of my constituents depend on the Scotch whisky industry for their livelihood.

I wish briefly to stress some of the most important aspects of the Bill. First, it prohibits the production of Scotch whisky other than in terms of what is known as Scotch whisky in Scotland. Secondly, it restricts the sale as Scotch whisky of spirits which are manifestly not Scotch whisky. Thirdly, a tight definition of Scotch whisky is provided for the trade.

We have much to fight against on behalf of the industry. In the last 10 or 15 years, it has lost its premium position and a number of issues are on the European horizon about moves towards harmonisation of the tax on alcohol. There is a threat from cheap substitutes, especially from Japan and, to a lesser extent, from Spain. Japan also exercises discrimination. In Britain, there is a threat from substitutes, especially white spirits. Many young people are taken with such drinks, and it is up to the Scotch whisky industry to regain its position and to market itself aggressively.

The Bill goes a long way towards helping the industry. It is not just about minimum alcohol strength, although that is mentioned in the Bill. I thank the Minister and place on record my appreciation for his consideration of the Scotch whisky interests. He has said that he will consult everybody about the minimum alcohol level, and that is a worthy aim.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) is interested in this subject. As several hon. Members have said, he is not here for the debate, but that is because he has been unavoidably detained on parliamentary business—I believe in Central America. He is sorting out the concerns of the world, and I am sure that he will be involved in the peace processes that are taking place in Central America. I am told that he has a secondary and secret agenda. If a Contra, Sandinista or a president or a diplomat is drinking adulterated whisky, my hon. Friend will take it out of his hand and pour it down the drain. He is a true ambassador for Scotch whisky and is serving our interests just as much by being in another continent as by being in the Chamber.

As I have said, the Bill is about not just minimum alcohol strength, but quality—and that is the key word in the Bill. The initiative by the hon. Member for Tayside, North will maintain the quality of Scotch whisky. He has given me some hope because only a few days ago I took a number of my constituents to a bar in the House and found that two of the prime products of my constituency, J and B whisky and Ballantine's whisky, two of the finest blended whiskies in the land and two of our finest exporters, are not on sale in the House. I shall follow the example of the hon. Member for Tayside, North and fight long and hard in the House for J and B and Ballantines to be on the shelves, so that everyone can experience the pleasure of those lovely blended Scotch whiskies.

The Bill will help to preserve the purity of Scotch whisky and sustain the reputation and image on which its sale depends. In addition, it will retain a great many jobs in my constituency. I congratulate the hon. Member for Tayside, North on introducing the Bill.

11.34 am

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): In moving the Third Reading of his Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) thanked a number of people for their help. The House will be aware that I am the parliamentary adviser to the Scotch Whisky Association and, accordingly, I declare an interest. Perhaps, on behalf of the association and the industry generally, I could express my thanks to my hon. Friend for his work in getting the Bill as far as he has.

Piloting a private Member's Bill through the House involves a good deal of attention to detail. We have had some demonstration in the debate of my hon. Friend's mastery of detail. He was unduly modest about his clear knowledge of the industry. It also requires a clear understanding of parliamentary procedures and, of course, the skill of a diplomat. I do not think that my hon. Friend will be offended when I say that he is not always the most uncontroversial Member of the House. I admire the way in which he handled potentially awkward situations in a most effective and diplomatic manner. Our thanks are especially due to him because he is a teetotaller. How noble and unselfish can one be? Perhaps the appropriate expression, if it is not too corny, is that he is displaying a fine generosity of spirit.

The Bill is extremely valuable to the industry, but is also of great service to the consumer. It will ensure a clear definition of Scotch whisky, so that there can be no possible confusion with any other product that is simply called whisky and, by definition, is therefore inferior. The Bill will enable regulations to be made about the strength of Scotch whisky. On Second Reading, I drew attention to the way in which purchasers of whisky can be misled by apparent bargains, bottles that are smaller than standard and contain a watered-down product, a whisky of lower than normal strength.

I thank my hon. Friend for his work on behalf of the industry and on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of Scotch whisky drinkers throughout the land who will continue to enjoy a quality product. If he wishes, my hon. Friend may toast his success in orange juice. I shall drink to him and to what I suppose will be known as "Bill's Bill", which will in due course hopefully become the Walker Act. I shall do so with a dram or two of the superb product that is the subject of the Bill.

11.37 am

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): Like other hon. Members, I should like to place on record again my thanks to the promoter of the Bill. The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) has done his part to protect not only the Scotch whisky industry but part of the heritage of Scotland.

It was a privilege to serve on the Committee, because the debates were very good-natured. They were well conducted and I found the Minister most helpful in his explanations about why some of our amendments were out of order, incorrect or too far-fetched to be considered. The deliberations were carried on in an atmosphere of good spirit—one might say, full-strength spirit.

We all know the purpose of the Bill. It offers protection to the reputation and value of Scotch whisky. There is nothing to be ashamed of in offering such protection. It is not done with any inward, blinkered look, because it is quite proper to protect part of the heritage of Scotland and the United Kingdom. It is necessary to arm our Ministers for the discussions that will take place about European legislation. It will help them to have that necessary protection outlined and already understood by everyone. Perhaps that sums up the significance and importance of the Bill.

We ought to deal, if only for a short time, with the legal definition of whisky. I do not intend to read from the red book that has been mentioned, which deals with the Scotch whisky industry and is extremely well written and most informative. Other hon. Members have mentioned their constituency interests, but I shall refrain from doing so, other than to say that I come from Kilmarnock which, as everyone knows, is the home of Johnnie Walker, the world's brand leader in whisky exports. I am sure that someone will be happy to hear that.

I received my copy of the booklet from Dr. Kell, the production director at Johnnie Walker. It is an extremely useful document. I shall quote from that document and I shall also quote in local dialect. That may cause some concern to the *Hansard* writers, but before they get their undergarments in any sort of disarray I promise that I shall send up all my quotes, including the quotations in local dialect.

It is worth mentioning the legal definition of Scotch whisky as the Minister skipped round the Irish part of the legislation. I can understand why. The legislation states:

> "The expression 'Scotch Whisky' shall mean whisky which has been distilled and matured in Scotland and the expression 'Irish Whiskey' shall mean whiskey which has been distilled and matured in the Republic of Ireland or in Northern Ireland or partly in one and partly in the other".

I can understand the confusion that may arise from that and why the Minister skipped that part of the legislation.

It is worth considering the history of duty on whisky. I have studied the amount of money that the Exchequer draws in from the production of Scotch whisky. In 1987, the money received will most certainly exceed £1 billion; £1,000 million in excise duty and VAT is an extremely valuable aid to the coffers of the Exchequer. The only part of the Budget with which I found any joy was the favourable treatment which the Chancellor gave to excise duty on Scotch whisky. I should like to think that the all-party early-day motion put down in my name had some small influence on the Chancellor's actions. That favourable treatment has saved many jobs in Scotland, and not just the 16,000 jobs of those directly employed in the Scotch whisky industry. It is estimated that between 30,000 and 35,000 jobs are directly or indirectly connected with the whisky industry in Scotland. It is important that we protect those jobs.

With regard to the history of the duty, I discovered with some interest that the Scots Parliament of 1644 passed an Excise Act that fixed the duty at 2s 8d per pint of aqua vitae or other strong liquor. I thought that that duty was a large amount for the time, but I went on to discover that the Scots pint was approximately one third of a gallon. In those circumstances, such a duty was not too excessive.

For the remainder of the 17th century, various alterations were made to the types and amounts of duty collected. After the Union of the Parliaments in 1707, English Revenue staff crossed the border to begin their lengthy attempts to bring whisky production under control. Some 90 years later, the excise laws were in such a hopeless state of confusion that no two distilleries were taxed at the same rate and illicit distilleries flourished—

[Mr. William McKelvey]

one can hardly believe that in Scotland. Smugglers saw no good reason for paying for the privilege of making their native drink. How times have changed.

Dr. Moonie: With reference to the duty imposed in 1644, was it Scots pence or English pence? There was quite a difference between the two.

Mr. McKelvey: It was Scots pence.

Even in those days, the public did not like the idea of paying any duty and one can understand why.

When researching the history of excise duty, I also managed to dig up, with the help of a kindly lady in the Library, Miss Andrews, who seems to know a lot about these things, a piece that was written by Robert Burns, who, we all know, was the Ayrshire bard. At some time he served as an excise man and I do not believe he ever forgave himself for that. I will not read out all the poem, for two reasons—first, because of its length and, secondly, in deference to my predecessor who is a renowned expert on Burns; thus the less Burns I quote, the better I might stand in his eyes. The poem is entitled:

"The author's earnest cry and prayer, to the right hon. and hon. Scotch Representatives in the House of Commons".

It is extremely pertinent. Although Robbie Burns refers to the right hon. and hon. Members as the "Scotch representatives", he meant representatives from Scotland and not those who were paid by the Scotch Whisky Association—if, indeed, that association was in vogue at that time.

In the poem, Burns makes several excellent references to whisky. I shall do my best to recite it. The poem refers to the quality of whisky—not the flavour—but the qualities with which it can endow a person who has imbibed. It says:

"But bring a SCOTCHMAN frae his hill,
Clap in his cheek a highlan gill,
Say, such is royal GEORGE's will,
An' there's the foe,
He has nae thought but how to kill
Twa at a blow.

Nae cauld, faint-hearted doubtings tease him;
Death comes, with fearless eye he sees him;
Wi' bluidy hand a welcome gies him;
An' when he fa's,
His latest draught o' breathin lea'es him
In faint huzzas."

Even in his death throes, that Scotsman—having taken two for every one—died in a dignified fashion, according to the enemy, with the haze of his breath having taken with the marvellous dram.

"SCOTLAND, my auld, respected Mither!
Tho' whyles ye moistify your leather,
Till when ye speak, ye aiblins blether;
Yet deil-mak-matter!
FREEDOM and WHISKY gang thegither,
Tak aff your whitter,"

Burns knew the value of the joys of life in more ways than one. In his poems he was able to establish a love for whisky. In another poem he said:

"John Barleycorn was a hero bold,
Of noble enterprise,
For if you do but taste his blood,
'Twill make your courage rise."

What a marvellous sentiment.

I well remember an occasion when I stood on the hallowed slopes of Hampden when Scotland were playing England. It was one of those rare occasions when Scotland scored first. There was a tumultuous roar from the assembled crowd. For some reason that I cannot explain, in this horde of kilted and tartan clad patriots among whom I stood there was one solitary white bonnet worn by an Englishman.

He must have been overcome by the noise around him and the fact that Scotland had scored, as he looked a bit sad. A huge Scotsman dressed in a kilt that was two feet below his knee who was absolutely properly dressed with a replica Scottish jersey and a Glengarry with a pheasant's feather about nine feet tall on the top said to him, "Jimmy, don't be afraid to cheer your team on. Nobody hear will bother ye. In fact, we'd like ye to join in our celebrations." He offered the rather pale Englishman a large dram in a none too clean glass. The man turned an even whiter shade of pale and he said in a low voice, "Well, actually, I don't drink." I swear that 90,000 pairs of eyes turned to glower.

Discretion being the better part of valour, the Englishman said, "On the occasion of Scotland scoring that goal, however, I will partake of your national drink." With a shaking hand, he closed his eyes and downed it in a one-er. He turned 40 shades of green. It was just as well we were not at the Ranger's end at Ibrox. The big Scotsman said, "Well done, Jimmy. Did you like that?" "Yes," lied the Englishman. "Well," says he, "there's another." Nevertheless, the last that I saw of that Englishman, he was arm in arm with a huge Scot. He had obviously enjoyed the rest of the match, which, incidentally, ended in a draw, one's up.

That is part of what we think Scotch whisky is all about.

On the serious side, we seek measures to protect not only part of our heritage but an important part of the commercial side of Scotland—jobs. It would be unforgivable if anything were to happen to the Bill between now and its going on to the statute book. The vast majority of my constituents—indeed, the vast majority of Scots and, to be fair, the vast majority of the population of the United Kingdom—wish the hon. Member for Tayside, North every success with the passage of his Bill. We owe him a debt.

Scots will be suitably reminded of that debt, but we are not sure how we shall honour it. As the hon. Gentleman is a teetotaller, his gesture is all the more noble. I know him as a next-door neighbour. If he ever feels an inclination to partake of a small libation of our national drink, he can rest assured that, next door, there is a bottle of the Macallan, what is left of a bottle of Cardhu, and some other unmentionable drinks of which he may partake. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman, and I am sure that all hon. Members join me in doing so. I know that he will have success with his Bill and will receive congratulations not only from the House but from the population of Scotland.

11.51 am

Mr. Allan Stewart: It is always a pleasure to listen to the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. Mckelvey), and it has been a particular pleasure to do so this morning. He is proving himself to be a most worthy successor to Lord Ross of Marnock. I hope that my hon. Friend sends his quotations to *Hansard*, for the benefit of posterity and for getting them right. I am sure that he will confirm that his friend at Hampden park watched a match

that took place before the passage of the 1981 legislation. He would be the last person to suggest that a typical Scotsman would seek to break the law of the land.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) and the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) on his wisdom in introducing the Bill. My hon. Friend the member for Tayside, North referred to the pressure on hon. Members who are successful in the ballot for private Members' Bills. Of course, such pressures are particularly great the higher up the list an hon. Member goes. My hon. Friend chose to bring forward a measure of great benefit to a crucial Scottish and, indeed, British industry, and he has received all-party support. However, the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) had reservations on a certain point. All hon. Members accept the reasons why the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley is not able to be present today, although I did not quite share the insouciance of the hon. Member for Dumbarton at the prospect of the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley spreading sweetness and light in Central America, by jerking glasses of adulterated whisky out of the hands of local political leaders and hurling the contents down the nearest drain. I am sure that, during his sojourn, he will do his best for the industry.

As several hon. Members have said, my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North is not generally regarded as a consensus figure in Scottish politics. There have been occasions on which I have entirely agreed with what my hon. Friend has said, but I have had a feeling that we were in a fairly small minority. However, he has rightly united the House today. I congratulate him also on his success in steering the Bill through Committee—a most interesting Committee—and on his comprehensive speech on Third Reading. It has been followed by a good debate this morning.

I hope that the televising of parliamentary proceedings will not ignore the importance of debates such as this. Of course, adversarial politics take place in the House—that is right and necessary—but Fridays are traditionally given over to this kind of constructive debate, across party lines. It is important that television viewers appreciate that that is part of the activities of the House.

I have the honour to be one of the sponsors of my hon. Friend's Bill. I was not a member of the Standing Committee that examined it. I was originally nominated, but, somewhat to my surprise, I was removed from membership, and my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) was my replacement. Initially, I thought that it was confusion because not only does "Sherwood" sound like "Eastwood", but my hon. Friend and I share the same surname and the same initial. The consequences are interesting. Many letters arrive at the House addressed to "A. Stewart, MP". The result is that I am extremely knowledgeable about affairs in Nottinghamshire, and my hon. Friend is extremely knowledgeable about affairs in Eastwood. Occasionally, the confusion leads to difficulties. Recently, my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood and I turned up at a most prestigious, large dinner, to discover that they had been expecting one A. Stewart, MP, and not two. However, I am glad to say that we were made welcome, and, in the course of the evening, we did our best to boost the sales of the industry that is the subject of the Bill.

My hon. Friend was put on the Standing Committee in his capacity as parliamentary private secretary to the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Several hon. Members have specific and important constituency interests in the whisky industry. The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) takes the record for the most distilleries in her constituency—37. Opposition Members have many interests. The hon. Members for Dumbarton and for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) represent my clan whisky, Stewart's Cream of the Barley. I hasten to say, with some regret, that I have no pecuniary interest in its production. There is a bottling plant in Eastwood. Many of my constituents work in the whisky industry and in industries that depend on it. That point was ably made by the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun.

As I said, it was not my pleasure to be a member of the Standing Committee, but I congratulate all its members on their expertise. Scottish hon. Members are sometimes accused of not knowing what they are talking about, but that allegation cannot be levelled at members of Standing Committee C. The highlight of their experience was, perhaps, when the hon. Member for Dundee, East was asked by the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun what "saccharify " meant. Without blinking an eyelid, he replied:

> "'Saccharify' means to convert starch into sugar, and 'diastase' means any group of enzymes that hydrolyse starch into maltose. 'Hydrolyse' means to subject to or to undergo hydrolysis, and maltose is a disaccharide of glucose which is formed by the enzymic hydrolyis of starch and, I believe, is also a nutrient in infant feed."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee C*, 20 January 1988; c. 9.]

As a demonstration of immediate expertise, that takes some beating.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North said that the Committee also debated the important subject of the effect of adding water to whisky. Many consumers are under the impression that adding water to whisky at the blending stage does not make any difference to the final product, other than to the alcohol content.

I was also interested to read the explanation given in Committee of the historic background of the word "proof". Apparently it originally related to whisky and gunpowder being mixed and ignited. If the gunpowder flashed, there was sufficient whisky in the mixture to cause ignition, and the whisky was then held to be "proof".

Mr. McKelvey: Since the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, that process no longer happens.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman has once more exhibited the depth of his expertise on an industry that matters so much to his constituency.

The background to the Bill goes back to June 1982, when the European Commission submitted to the Council of Ministers proposals for a regulation that would, inter alia, contain a definition of "whisky". Of course, products called "whisky" are produced in parts of the European Community other than Scotland, Wales and Ireland. I often holiday in Spain, which has a locally produced whisky called Dyc. I have never tasted it, but it is widely on sale. Because of the proposed definition of Euro-whisky, there was clearly a need for a proper and up-to-date definition of Scotch whisky. That is desirable in itself, but it also strengthens the hands of Ministers in the negotiating process. I am sure that we can rely upon my

[Mr. Stewart]

hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to be very strong in the negotiations. I draw to his attention the ministerial career of Jim Hacker, which was transformed when he moved from being a Minister to the Prime Minister, entirely because of his defence of the British sausage against proposals for a Euro-sausage. I do not think that the negotiations in which my hon. Friend will be involved will necessarily lead to such a dramatic conclusion, but who knows?

An important improvement to the Bill made in Committee was the addition of subsection (1)(c) to clause 1: "to keep or use in Scotland for the purpose of blending." I understand that that ensures the prohibition of whiskies other than Scotch whisky being blended in Scotland with other whiskies. Without that important addition, a blend could have been legitimately described as a whisky product of Scotland or a whisky blended in Scotland. That would have misled consumers both at home and abroad because the average consumer would assume whisky with such labelling to be genuine Scotch whisky. The amendment went to the heart of the purpose of the Bill, which is to protect the reputation of Scotch whisky—not so much in the United Kingdom market, but in the world markets.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst emphasised, about 85 to 90 per cent. of Scotch whisky production is exported around the world. Over the years, the industry has had a constant battle against unfair competitive practices in many of those markets. It has had to spend substantial amounts each year identifying counterfeit practices and seeking legal retribution in foreign courts. Perhaps the most publicised example during recent years has been Japan. The industry can be proud of its input to the EEC's case to GATT on the liberalisation of the Japanese spirit market. I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Minister can tell us the up-to-date position on that.

The contribution of the Scotch whisky industry has been fully described by hon. Members. On Second Reading, my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) described it as the three "Es"—Exchequer, exports and employment. I want to underline what my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North and the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun said about the recent treatment of the industry by the Chancellor. In successive Budgets, he has clearly recognised the importance of the industry, and I am sure that he will continue to do so.

Mr. Bill Walker: During his Budget speech, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said that he was not in favour of paper profits. Is it not important that we recognise that that is, effectively, the result of taxation on stocks of Scotch whisky? I hope that my right hon. Friend will deal with that in a future Budget.

Mr. Stewart: I share my hon. Friend's view—indeed, the all-party group has pressed for changes in the taxation of stock. The industry is in the unusual position of having to hold stock for at least three years, and sometimes considerably longer for some malt whiskies, before it can go to the market place. However, on the duty aspect my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has clearly recognised the concern of the industry.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North about duty because it must be logical to tax drinks such as whisky—and, indeed, all the products of the drinks industry—more directly in relation to alcoholic content. The industry's contribution to exports is a massive £1,000 million a year.

I should like to underline the importance of what was said by the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun about indirect employment. The figure of 16,000 has been quoted as being the number of jobs that are directly dependent on the industry, but a substantial number of jobs are more or less indirectly dependent on the industry. Those jobs are in the manufacturing and service industries. I have constituents who are involved in, for example, the packaging industry. That industry does not receive a great deal of attention but, in Scotland, is an example of an efficient industry, that can respond quickly to the kind of demands for export markets that the Scotch whisky industry puts on it. There is also a range of jobs in the service industries, such as marketing and advertising, which depend more or less on the industry.

In conclusion, we are giving the industry the kind of protection that other products such as port and cognac already have. The Bill is a practical measure that will help to ensure the prosperity of our leading industry. I wish it well and hope that it will have a safe and secure passage through the other House.

12.10 pm

Mr. Bob McTaggart (Glasgow, Central): Like other hon. Members of all parties, I should like to pay my warm congratulations to the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) for bringing forward the Bill. As a late convert to the joys of whisky, I must say that the Bill's Committee stages were educational and extremely informative, none more so than a visit that many of us paid to a laboratory in Menstrie where scientists demonstrated the work that they do to help to keep whisky to such a high standard.

Although many eloquent speeches were made on Second Reading and in Committee, none was more eloquent than that of my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), who sends his apologies because, unfortunately, he cannot be with us today because of pressing parliamentary business. In Committee many hon. Members waxed lyrical about the magic properties of the amber nectar. As a late convert, I could only sit in awe at my colleagues' superior knowledge on this subject. They knew so much about it that I could not add anything further to their adjectives, which can be read in *Hansard.*

In these difficult times in the House, when tempers have risen and there has been anger on the Benches—no one will know that better than Mr. Speaker and his colleagues—it has been inspiring to see, for the first time in a long time, unity and cross-party support for a Bill, and to see genuine concern about the quality of the product and the employment prospects of the many people who are involved in the whisky industry. That point cannot be emphasised enough. As we have heard, about 16,000 jobs are directly related to the industry and a substantial number have been created in some of the more remote parts of Scotland. Anyone who has the good fortune to travel through Scotland, especially through the north of Scotland, will appreciate that and understand the

importance of the Scotch whisky industry to those communities. I hope that on the way back from such a tour, people will stop off at Glasgow where they can visit the Glasgow Garden Festival and enjoy a glass of White Horse or Long John. I shall not plug my constituency as other hon. Members have plugged theirs during the debate.

As well as the obvious importance of whisky to jobs, whisky is also important as an export earner. As one of the country's most consistently successful exports, Scotch whisky makes a substantial net contribution to Britain's foreign exchange. Export earnings have been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey). Until 1983, whisky contributed about £860 million per annum to the Exchequer. That figure is much more inflated today and everyone who is connected with the industry is to be congratulated on it. Therefore, it is of tremendous importance to Scotland and, indeed, to Britain to have the definition of Scotch whisky revised, in terms of the reputation of the product and in relation to exports, as it affects the livelihoods of so many people.

I do not wish to add anything to the debate about the minimum strength of Scotch whisky, except to say that I sincerely hope that any dissent will not deter the Bill from becoming law as soon as possible. Our main concern must be to have a strong definition of Scotch whisky, of an accepted strength, distilled and, in my opinion, preferably bottled, in Scotland. It is a product of the highest quality, with a uniqueness of flavour. Its production is based on the purest natural produce such as malt and barley, and other cereals for grain whiskies, not to mention the pure Scottish water which was debated earlier. Much of that cereal is produced in Scotland and generates employment and income.

Another vital element in the process is time, and, as we have heard, three years is the very minimum maturation time, although the best malts are matured for 12, 15 and even 20 years. Inferior products that purport to be called "whisky", especially the Euro-whiskies, allow the use of enzymes and other chemicals to speed up the fermentation process and, therefore, turn out an inferior product in less time. We cannot allow those developments to take place in Scotland. I hope that the Bill will help our campaign within the EEC to have that practice halted.

We have heard that the Bill is supported by the trade unions as well as by the Scotch Whisky Association. It is imperative that it is passed as quickly as possible because, as we have heard, Scotch whisky is one of our most important exports. It is important that its role as a quality product of a unique character, is not eroded either by a lack of adequate legislation to protect its role, or by usurpers offering an inferior product.

All that the Bill seeks to do is to give Scotch whisky the same protection of law as is enjoyed by champagne, cognac and Harris tweed—surely that is a modest request. I hope that the Bill can proceed today, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Tayside, North once again.

12.17 pm

Dr. Godman: For the record I should say that the exchanges are occurring between hon. Members who are either teetotal or who take whisky in extreme moderation. It is a fine product, but it is to be taken in moderation.

I advise the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) that I welcome the Bill. Many members of my trade union are employed in the industry. When the hon. Gentleman talks about the good industrial relations in the industry, he should pay tribute to the fine work that is performed by both the professional and lay trade union representatives. I welcome the Bill and compliment the hon. Member for Tayside, North on promoting it.

I compliment also the Minister for his characteristic courtesy and especially on his announcement of the visit to Scotland. I should like to ask him whether he intends to visit Port Glasgow—not that we distill or even blend or bottle whisky in Port Glasgow—but I thought that he might show his characteristic civility and offer a contract or two for the building of a couple of fisheries research vessels to the first-class yards in my constituency.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I believe that my hon. Friend the Minister of State is in Scotland today and he will undoubtedly bring back an enlarged portfolio on that matter.

Dr. Godman: That was a teasing intervention and the Minister should go further, but I am grateful for his comment. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. McTaggart), I have been pleased by the civility of the exchanges in the Chamber and in Committee.

As hon. Members have emphasised, whisky is an important indigenous industry, together with agriculture, fisheries and forestry. As the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) said, our distilleries play a useful part in our tourist industry as many tour operators include in the itinerary of coach tours a visit to a distillery. They are of growing importance with their distinctive architecture and products.

I do not wish to strike any discord, but we should not be too sentimental about the Scotch Whisky Association. I regret that much of this excellent product is transported to southern English ports before being loaded on to ships for destinations throughout the world.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): I only wish to correct the hon. Gentleman. He spoke of southern English ports, but most whisky is exported from Teesside, which is a northern English port.

Dr. Godman: I am glad of that intervention. The hon. Gentleman has not been here for more than a few minutes, but at least he has some interest in the debate. A great deal of whisky is shipped from southern English ports, such as Felixstowe among others, but I accept that some of it goes from Teesside. We have important ports in Scotland, such as the Greenock container terminal and Grangemouth, which would benefit from the transshipment of the product.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) was a member of the Committee on the Bill and that he has an interest in this matter, as we all do?

Dr. Godman: I recognise that the hon. Gentleman was a member of the Committee, but I am sorry that he was not present earlier to listen to some of the excellent speeches made by hon. Members on both sides of the House. He might have shown interest in the fine amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Moray.

[Dr. Godman]

As many of my hon. Friends said, the whisky industry is important as an employer of highly skilled labour. My hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) emphasised the skills of the still man and his staff, and there are other traditional skills to be found in our distilleries and elsewhere. The hon. Member for Moray highlighted the importance of the relationship between the industry and other rural indigenous industries, and the connections between the industries.

Agriculture and forestry can affect the supply of fine water to the industry. I suggested that dangers may emanate from the uncontrolled development of fish farming—perhaps from those located away from sea lochs. That presents a genuine potential danger. At present, that problem may not affect the whisky industry, but it is right and proper that we bring it to the Minister's attention because it causes considerable anxiety to employers and employees in other indigenous industries, especially in our maritime communities.

The hon. Lady has a mixture of interests to represent. Two weeks ago, at a conference in Inverness, all the delegates from fishermen's associations around the Scottish coast and on the Islands expressed their considerable anxiety about the effects of pollution from fish farming because of its haphazard growth. Curiously, it is controlled by the Crown Estates Commissioners. Their powers in relation to the industry's development should be severely curtailed.

I welcome the development and growing importance of fish farming, but it is a long way behind the whisky industry; if the development of fish farming affects the long-established whisky industry, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland must take swift, incisive and decisive action to restrain or reduce that form of pollution where it is seen as a threat.

I had a telephone call from Mr. Patrick Stewart, secretary to the Clyde Fishermen's Association, who said that in remote communities—for example, in Argyll—there is anxiety about the pollution problem. The point that I am labouring is that research into pollution in this industry should not be in any way reduced. The state funding of this element of agriculture and forestry reserch—I should like to add, fisheries research—must be maintained by the Government. The research should not be measured by criteria adopted or adapated from the so-called market place. Our indigenous industries of agriculture, forestry, fishing and whisky need to be assisted by realistically funded research and development programmes. That means that state funding must continue at an acceptable level.

Finally, on behalf of the Opposition, I offer my sincere thanks to the hon. Member for Tayside, North. This is a fine Bill about a fine product. As the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) and my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) pointed out, the industry employs many people directly and indirectly. So this is an important Bill which will strengthen this industry. I also thank the Minister for his co-operation and characteristic courtesy.

12.28 pm

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): I was interested to hear that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. McTaggart) was a recent convert to the delights of Scotch whisky. When he and I attended a number of meetings late last year, I thought that he was an expert on a drink called rum punch, but perhaps his attentions have moved on.

I, however, have no interest to declare. I do not represent any Scotch whisky producers, and I do not speak as a consumer either.

I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) for not wearing a kilt, because, through my maternal grandmother, I am entitled to wear the Fraser tartan. I was interested to hear my hon. Friend say that he used to run department stores. If he can obtain for me a Fraser clan kilt or tie, I shall gladly reimburse him.

I hesitate to shake the concordat that has settled on the House, but I feel that legislation which seeks to impose restrictions needs continual justification. Although I have an open mind on the issue, I feel that we have a right to question the necessity for the Bill. Let us make no mistake: it is a protectionist measure, and, as one who believes that we should go in for free trade as far as possible, I feel some unease about its provisions. I am concerned lest we create a dangerous precedent.

However, not only do I need to be convinced that the Bill is necessary; I need to be convinced that, if enacted, it will be effective. I have to tell my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North that, at this stage, I am not so convinced, and I hope that when he replies he will be able to answer a specific question.

If the Bill is passed as now drafted, what will happen in the following circumstances? Let us suppose that a company—I shall call it the Nippon Whisky Company—decides to open its operations in the Borders, and produces a product called, say, Tam O'Shanter Whisky. If the company then labels the product "Tam O'Shanter Whisky—produced from the Borders of Scotland", will that fall foul of the Bill?

Mr. Bill Walker: I can answer that question now. The border between Scotland and England is clearly defined, and if the company is on the Scottish side, it will be illegal for it to act as my hon. Friend suggests. If it is on the English side, there is no way in which it can make such a claim. That would contravene other legislation covering sources of origin and consumer protection. Either way, it would be a contravention.

Mr. Knight: I am reassured to some extent, but, as I understand it from something that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) said earlier outside the House, there is a certain village in the Borders that crosses over from England into Scotland. It occurred to me that if a company set up its operations there and did not put on the label that the whisky was produced in Scotland, but used the words "Borders of Scotland", that would be a clear attempt to pass the whisky off. I do not think that the Bill would cover that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North mentioned the Orders in Council that will be necessary. Will he explain why so many matters are being left to subordinate legislation? I feel that the House has a right to know what it is approving, and the final state in which the Act will be enforced. As I understand it, the Orders in

Council will not require the affirmative process in the House, so there will be no opportunity to debate those important matters further.

I was interested to hear what my hon. Friend said about the Bill giving only a civil power. I accept that that is the right way to proceed, and I think that it would be wrong for the police to be involved in pursuing breaches of the Act. I am, however, concerned about a matter that I raised during my hon. Friend's speech.

Clause 2 deals with restrictions on sales, and with who is entitled to take the matter to court. Subsection (2)(a) and (b) make it clear that the only person who can make a complaint is

"any person carrying on the business of producing Scotch whisky; or . . . any person or body appearing to the court to be a representative of any group of such persons".

In my view, my hon. Friend has got that part wrong. If we are interested in consumer rights—I know that my hon. Friend said in reply to my earlier intervention that consumer rights were covered by other Acts—I feel that those rights should be underlined and enforced by being included in this legislation. There should be no objection to widening clause 2, and I wish that my hon. Friend had included the right of a customer to institute proceedings.

Mr. Bill Walker: My hon. Friend overlooks the most important reason why the Bill was introduced. More than 90 per cent. of what is produced by the Scotch whisky industry is sold outside Scotland. We wish to prevent the manufacture of whisky that is not up to standard. My hon. Friend should remember that consumer legislation already exists to protect United Kingdom consumers. The Bill is intended to protect the industry from outside intervention.

Mr. Knight: I am grateful for that intervention. I hope that that will be the case and that my hon. Friend the Minister can reassure the House that the consumer who is served with an inferior product after he has asked for Scotch whisky has the right to pursue the matter further.

Provided that my fears are answered adequately—my hon. Friend has already answered some of them—I shall not impede the passage of the Bill.

12.36 pm

Dr. Moonie: I hesitate to introduce a sour note into such a benign and friendly debate, but I shall do my best. It may seem odd to hear praising the drinks industry someone who, since he came into the House, has been closely identified with speaking about the ill effects of alcohol and its abuse, but I see no inconsistency. There is nothing wrong with alcohol in moderation. I am not a teetotaller. I have not been so since my middle teens, and I have no intention of becoming so in the future.

I wish to focus on some of the problems that will be caused by the Bill. I am sponsored by the Co-operative party, and I have had a longstanding interest in the activities of co-operative societies. They have expressed considerable anxiety about the provision for the minimum strength to be applied in later regulations. A minimum strength of about 40 deg. has been suggested. The Co-operative Wholesale Society is a major producer of whisky at 37·5 deg. Therefore, I wonder whether the Bill is an example of a restrictive practice rather than a legitimate standardisation. I find it difficult to tell the difference in flavour or quality between whiskies at 40 deg. and 37·5 deg.

Mr. Bill Walker: The hon. Gentleman should visit Menstrie. That may help him to understand the differences. The minimum strength has been decided as a result of the experience of maintaining the quality and look of the whisky at different temperatures throughout the world. It is important to recognise that only a tiny amount of the Scotch whisky produced is consumed in the United Kingdom. The Bill is intended to protect the industry because of its massive contribution to exports.

Dr. Moonie: During the past 20 years the biggest assault on the market share of Scottish Scotch whisky, as opposed to foreign-bottled whisky, has come from whisky brokers selling bulk supplies of malt whisky to foreign blenders, which has undercut our world market. It is not a reflection of the strength of the product.

I draw the attention of the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) to a tasting that *Decanter* carried out towards the end of last year of four under-strength and four standard-strength whiskies, at which one of the under-strength whiskies came second. Taste is all that counts; we drink whisky for its taste, not its alcoholic content. If there is no discernible effect in taste, I do not see why there should be any difference in the standard, provided it falls within a relatively narrow range.

I accept that there is a need for a narrow range, but we are talking about four groups of whiskies—over-proof whisky, which I prefer to refer to as full-strength whisky and the strength that I drink, the standard strength of 40 deg., low-strength whiskies, which go down to a level of 37·5 deg., and the vile whiskies that are produced abroad, which fall below that figure. The argument, therefore, is between standard and low-strength whiskies.

Scotch whisky has come under market pressure in the past decade, particularly from white spirits such as gin, vodka and types of rum. I well remember, about 15 years ago, that I had the good fortune to frequent a public house near Stobhill hospital in Glasgow. One of my medical colleagues had the temerity to ask for a gin and tonic, whereupon the barman took some money from his wallet, called "Hey, Jock," to an old gentleman sitting in the corner, and asked him to go to the off licence for a bottle of gin and two bottles of tonic because he did not have any on the shelf. Times have changed and, increasingly, white spirits are intruding into the overall market.

What is the argument against low-strength whisky? It does not taste any different. Most people buying standard-blended whiskies will mix them with other drinks, which will disguise any difference in taste quite considerably. I fail to see what legitimate concern there could be about standardising a product that is well diluted to 40 deg. for bottling.

Mr. Bill Walker: The hon. Gentleman is confusing a number of different issues. It is important that he should recognise that, unless a minimum strength is laid down —low-strength producers accept this fact—we may reach a level of 20 per cent. proof. The substantial differences in the quality of the product can be understood only if one goes to the laboratories and sees the effect of removing ingredients by filtration. That is the critical factor because, as I said earlier, it is of importance what the product looks like as well as how it tastes in all climates throughout the world, from the sub-zero temperatures of Antarctica to the hot temperatures of equatorial Africa.

Dr. Moonie: I do not think that the Scotch Whisky Association is very concerned with sales in Antarctica, although it may be concerned about sales in Australia, where, as I am sure the hon. Member for Tayside, North is aware, whiskies are sold at a strength of 37.5 deg.

Like the hon. Member for Tayside, North, I have studied Scotch whisky and the industry for many years. Given the benefits of my scientific training, I am perfectly familiar with the processes by which it is distilled, blended, treated and filtered before being bottled. I need no lectures about that matter from any hon. Member.

The argument is about restrictive practice. I agree that there should be restrictions on the strength of Scotch whisky, but I fail to see why a minimum should necessarily be specified rather than a band at which it could be sold. That is an alternative that might be worth considering.

Despite my strong support for the Bill, I shall listen with interest to the Minister's remarks before deciding whether to support the Bill or to divide the House.

12.44 pm

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, South): On Report, the Minister seemed to suggest that the funding of the agricultural research and development institutes in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, which make a valuable contribution, will be preserved. There are three major research institutes in Aberdeen, the southern half of which I am proud to represent. They are the Rowett, the Macaulay and the Torry fisheries research institute. All are in some turmoil because they have learned—not because the Government have told them or made the news public, but from the grapevine on which these matters become known—that the Government are reviewing research and development.

If the debate has highlighted one important fact, it is the valuable contribution that research and development make to agriculture, food and fisheries. We must remember throughout the debate that the Scotch whisky industry not only makes a valuable contribution through exports, trade and employment but is a major consumer of the services of these research and development facilities. There is concern in my constituency about the threat posed to these institutes by the Government's dogma and ideological views that the public sector is a bad thing and that much more private money should be put into those institutes.

I take some comfort from the Minister's statement earlier and hope that he will confirm that my comfort is well placed and that there is no intention to cut the moneys that the Government have ploughed in to these valuable centres, which contribute to British industry across the board, especially to the food, agriculture and fishing industries, to the rural parts of Britain and to Scotland, about which I am concerned.

12.46 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Like virtually every other hon. Member I shall add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) on presenting the Bill and on his work on it. I wish the Bill a speedy and easy passage through its remaining stages. Everyone who has spoken on Second Reading, in Committee or in today's debates has stressed the importance of the whisky industry, and there is little need for me to rehearse those arguments.

The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) drew our attention to the lower percentage proof blends. As a representative of a constituency which has almost 40 distilleries within its boundaries, I shall closely pursue the 40 per cent. rule. That rule is needed to protect the industry from unfair competition. If we do not have it, there will be a danger of the industry being undercut and undermined by poor substitutes because of European legislation. It may seem strange for a member of the Scottish National party to argue firmly for a 40 per cent. rule while previously, on other legislation, being very much against 40 per cent. rules. The producers in my area and organisations that represent producers are in no doubt that we need the 40 per cent. level.

I hope that the Minister will respond to the query of the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) on Japanese taxation. The general agreement on tariffs and trade directive has not worked as we would have hoped or as quickly as we would have liked. We hope that Scotch whisky will not cost £80 a bottle in Japan but will compete fairly with Japanese products. That discrimination against Scotch whisky must end. Like many others, I welcomed the Budget decision not to increase the excise duty, but there is still a question as to the taxation on stock. Has the Minister any thoughts on that matter?

I had intended to make a tourist brochure-like run through my constituency on various whisky processes, starting from agriculture and continuing through to the packaging and bottling of our major product, but I shall not, as my views on the area are well known and are recorded in other places.

Some hon. Members may have thought it strange that a teetotaller should have introduced this Bill, but we must note that the whisky industry has always adopted a very responsible attitude to alcohol abuse. It has contributed widely to research and encouraged people to enjoy alcohol in moderation. Whereas in the past one might have been offered a dram when leaving a distillery, nowadays one is offered a miniature—a move to try to discourage people from drinking and driving. The industry shows a very responsible attitude on the matter.

Dr. Godman: All of us have stressed the need to take the product in extreme moderation or perhaps to follow the lead given by the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), but what about alcohol rehabilitation treatment for employees at distilleries? I hope that the hon. Lady will tell the House that the industry looks after those of its employees suffering from the effects of alcohol abuse or alcohol misuse.

Mrs. Ewing: I thoroughly agree with the hon. Member. We are very conscious of the work that has been done in that respect. It is sad that more rehabilitation centres have not been set up—not just for people who have suffered because of their work but for those who may have misused or abused alcohol for other reasons. It is unfortunate that we do not have the facilities and detoxification centres that are so desperately required. Nevertheless, the whisky industry has shown a very responsible attitude over the years and we should commend it on that.

I have already invited the Minister to come to Moray. I should now like to extend that invitation to other hon. Members and to anyone who has listened to this debate or who may read about it. If people visited Moray, they would learn a great deal about the whisky industry. They

would be sure of a very warm welcome from the people of the area. They would have the opportunity to taste a dram in the places where the whisky is made and, in case anyone has any doubts about the weather, let me remind the House that Lossiemouth was the warmest place in Britain on Easter Monday.

12.51 pm

Mr. Donald Thompson: As has been said, the television cameras will soon be coming in, and I hope that, when they do, events such as this will be televised. I am reminded of my friend, Matthew Parris, who was formerly the hon. Member for Derbyshire, West, saying at about this time on a similar Friday that he was delighted to be called to speak in the debate on the Imprisonment of Prostitutes (Abolition) Bill. He told the House that he had had to cancel a very imporant engagement and that he had sent a telegram to say that he could not attend the Conservative ladies' luncheon because he was looking after their interests in the House of Commons. He was not re-elected.

First, I thank the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) for his kind words at the beginning of his speech and his characteristic defence of his constituents and his constituency. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State is in Scotland today. I have no idea what he is looking at or what he will bring back, so the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow must not allow his Scottish newspaper friends to read too much into my interjection. Nevertheless, I am pleased to be able to emphasise that I am not the only Minister at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food who knows where north of the border is.

I was interested in the hon. Gentleman's remarks about tourists visiting distilleries and other places to see how people work. If he comes to my constituency, he will find that the clogworks is open and he will be shown how clogs are manufactured. Incidentally clogs are still widely used in industry; they are not just a quaint and outdated form of footwear.

The hon. Gentleman made a plea about pollution and for what amounts almost to the harmonisation of all industries to ensure that there is no cross-pollution and that the rise of one industry does not lead to the demise of another. I take his point on that and it is something that we should consider centrally. Planning is very often a local matter, and planners, too, should take that into account at all times, when they are even considering an extension of another business. I do not want any business to be inhibited, but if one rises and another falls we are not even swapping two halfpennies for a penny. That just will not do, and I hope that planners in Scotland and in England will take heed of the wise and serious words that the hon. Gentleman saw fit to repeat twice today.

appreciate that some hon. Members have to leave and that some have already done so, so I will deal first with the points that individual Members have raised before dealing with other specific questions and finally making a general tidying-up statement on the Bill as a whole.

I join in the thanks expressed to my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) for introducing the Bill. I agreed with his emphasis on the importance of the regional headquarters of regional firms remaining in the regions. At present, the country's three most profitable industries are the three great drinks businesses. It is important that those huge enterprises should recognise the source of their strength and, wherever possible, keep their headquarters there. In my area, the neighbouring constituency of Halifax still has the headquarters of the Halifax building society. People of all academic abilities can thus find jobs there and go on to use that expertise throughout the country and, indeed, the world. The same applies to mining, shipbuilding and engineering and, especially, today, the whisky industry. I therefore echo my hon. Friend's emphasis on the importance of that aspect.

The hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) was also kind enough to thank me. He mentioned his constituents and was worried about cheap imports threatening the market wherever whisky is sold and drunk.

If the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) were not in Central America, I should no doubt be speaking even later today. He must be paying for part of the trip himself. If someone else were paying, no doubt he would have come here to make his speech and then gone back. The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) made his points firmly and severely, and I will deal with them later. I take his threat to divide the House seriously, but I hope to be able to persuade him to stay his hand.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) and I had the pleasure of drinking whisky in Hong Kong when we went to investigate that booming economy. My hon. Friend looks after the Scotch whisky industry in the House, not just on high days such as today but day by day and week by week, and he does so extremely well. He made a good point about the benefit of the Bill to the consumer, not just in this country but throughout the world. I do not regard other consumers as any less intelligent or able than Members of Parliament. Many are experts in their own fields, but Parliament must ensure that when busy people who are in haste when they go to the pub or the club, or when they go to the supermarket or store and reach for a bottle from the shelf, they get exactly what they pay for in terms of strength, quality, quantity, and so on, and that if the product is cheaper they know that it is not so strong or of poorer quality, or of a quality that is neither better nor worse but simply different. That is the basis of a great deal of our food legislation. I shall deal with the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) about that in due course. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst for his contribution and for making that point.

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey)—I almost called him my hon. Friend, and I hope that he is a friend—was, as usual, delightful. I thank him for his nice comments. I like to be included in his continual commercial for Johnnie Walker. When I leave this place, perhaps I shall get a job there. We know about the man who first brought Johnnie Walker down here and about the grocers who decided to give bottles of whisky away at Christmas, hence the demise of gin and the rise in whisky. However, there may be doubts about that.

I shall pass on to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer the hon. Gentleman's praise for all that my right hon. Friend did in the Budget. According to the hon. Gentleman my right hon. Friend was very sensible not to tinker with the duty. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's early-day motion was the peppercorn in the scale that was instrumental in swinging the Chancellor. I can imagine my right hon. Friend saying on the night before the Budget, "In view of this early-day motion, I shall not touch the tax on whisky."

[Mr. Donald Thompson]

I always enjoy listening to the contributions by the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun. Hon. Members who were not here and missed his two snatches of verse which typified the spirit of the Bill missed a great deal. I am sure that the verse will not come out as sharply in its *Hansard* translation. When I take a dram with the hon. Gentleman I shall remember not to take him to the Loyal George, although I doubt whether there is one in Scotland.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), who is still in the Chamber and is often mistaken for the parliamentary private secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, made a sensible contribution, especially about television in the House. He also asked about the up-to-date situation in Japan, as did the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing). The latest position on the GATT case about the Japanese taxation system, which discriminates strongly against whisky, and which has been attacked by Governments of all complexions for many years, is that the response of the Japanese Government to the criticisms of the GATT panel is, would hon. Members believe, still awaited. In the meantime, both the European Community and the Government have left the Japanese Government in no doubt that we expect them to review their taxation system and to modify it so that it completely removes discrimination against Scotch whisky and enables our product to compete under fair conditions in their market. By our product I mean, of course, Scotch whisky. There is no doubt that when it is given a reasonable chance to compete it does well.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. McTaggart) apologised for the absence of the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion). Many hon. Members who served on the Committee have constituency engagements today, and many of us fulfil them as well in taking part in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) has left the Chamber. The Opposition were a bit hard on my hon. Friend, who contributed to the Committee, as did my hon. Friends the Members for Leicester, North-West (Mr. Ashby), for Winchester (Mr. Browne), for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Mr. Fairbairn) and my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Munro). They all did what they could to make sure that the Bill reached this stage. I make no apology to my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North, who is sitting in a corner seat reading the Bill, when I say that this is a protectionist measure. The Government reasonably and honestly do not believe in protectionism.

We are now part of Europe and as such it sets no precedent. Other hon. Members and I have commented on the fact that cognac, port, champagne, sherry and other drinks are protected. The precious investment that we have in Scotland that has arisen as a result of the nature of the water and the peat—the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Moray gave us the important opportunity to discuss those factors for 90 minutes this morning—must be protected. The Government and I make no apology for looking after our own, in this case, the Scotch whisky industry. If my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North wishes to divide on the measure he will need someone else to be a Teller and I do not think that he will find anyone.

I know that my hon. Friend is interested in non-profit making clubs. He does a great deal of work for all sorts of people who like to spend their evenings in non-profit making clubs—working men's clubs, Labour clubs, Liberal clubs, Conservative clubs and the rest. Perhaps those people are the consumers of whom he is thinking.

On 20 January in Committee when we were discussing clause 1 of the Bill, the hon. Member for Carrick and all the rest of it—I mean no disrespect—asked whether consumer groups were entitled to apply for an interdict under clause 1. That question has been repeated today. clause 1(2) and clause 2(2) provide for injunctions against the sale as Scotch whisky of spirit that does not meet the requirements of Scotch whisky laid down by order under clause 3 and against the sale of Scotch whisky below the minimum alcoholic strength whenever that is prescribed.

Under both Scottish and English law, the applicant for the injunction is required to show sufficient interest in the issue before the court will listen to the applicant's case. The purpose of clause 1(2) and clause 2(2) is to remove that initial requirement from a Scotch whisky producer or an association of Scotch whisky producers.

Clause 2(2) does not prevent consumers or consumer group associations from bringing an action in respect of activities that are made unlawful by the Bill. In practice, it is unlikely that they would wish to take proceedings in the civil court, but it is possible that they may wish to do so. In that case, they would have to show that they had sufficient interest and if they succeeded in showing that the court would hear the case.

No change is proposed in the Bill to the substantial body of existing food legislation that provides for the protection of the consumer by trading standards officers and in particular the way in which they enforce the food labelling regulations. Schedule 7 to those regulations covers misleading descriptions and it prohibits the use of the words "Scotch whisky" unless the product conforms with the definition in the Finance Act 1969, which is being amended by the Bill. That is still the most appropriate means of providing consumer protection.

My hon. Friend can be assured that discussions have taken place—not just in Committee—between hon. Members and the promoters of the Bill as to what if and the rest of it. That is one reason why we introduced blending in the Bill, so that Scotch whisky cannot be diluted by a blend of another whisky-type drink emanating from somewhere else.

Mr. Greg Knight My hon Friend's remarks about consumers' rights have more than satisfied me. Therefore, I have no intention of dividing the House, even though the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) keeps winking at me. I take that to mean that he wishes to act as a Teller.

Mr. Thompson: One down, one to go.

I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy. The first part of his speech related to alcohol misuse. He knows that, along with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs, I am a member of the alcohol misuse committee, under the chairmanship of the Leader of the House. We are taking that job very seriously indeed. The alcohol misuse committee sees no inconsistency in the Bill. Alcohol misuse should disturb everybody. Ninety per cent of the occasions on which I can remember whisky being drunk have been happy occasions. They have been a wedding, a christening

or a meeting of friends—a celebration. Unfortunately, there are cases of misuse. I am sure that the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy is concerned about misuse of alcohol.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I have listened with interest to the debate and to my hon. Friend the Minister's remarks about the way in which whisky is extremely helpful on convivial occasions. Does he agree also that there are certain life-giving properties associated with that admirable drink? Does not the very name derive from a Gaelic expression, "The water of life"? Will my hon. Friend expand on that idea?

Mr. Thompson: Madam Deputy Speaker would not like me to expand on that idea. I thank my hon. Friend for his interest, but the water of life matter has been referred to several times already.

Hon. Members who were present on Second Reading will remember other interesting advice. I have been trying ever since. If we could just get the right amount to drink every day, we shall live for ever. We experiment.

Dr. Godman: The Minister is making a serious point. There is no doubt that the incidence of alcohol misuse and abuse is high in the liquor industry. The Minister will agree that, regrettably, high levels of misuse are to be found in journalism. Some people have suggested that there should be an alcohol treatment centre for Lobby journalists. I do not offer that suggestion. Is it not important that all firms, whether or not they are in the Scotch whisky industry, should have treatment programmes for their employees?

Mr. Thompson: The hon. Gentleman made that point a few moments ago. It is quite right and proper.

The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy's point bringing our attention to alcohol abuse was right and reasonable. He is a physician. Therefore, I listened carefully to what he said. The Government view alcohol misuse seriously. We know that the proper use of alcohol will be enhanced by the Bill. People will know what they are buying as they take it from the shelf.

The hon. Gentleman went on to talk about various whisky strengths—45, 40, 37·5, and so on. My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North intervened during the speech of the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy. I shall refer to that matter later—*[Interruption.]* Not much later, I hope. I know that Opposition Members have to go home.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) referred to the importance of research and development and to Government and private sector contributions to that. All Government programmes are continually under review. I cannot go further than that on his specific constituency points, and I do not think that he expects me to do so. We are grateful to the Scotch Whisky Association and the Brewers Society for the amount of information that they have provided on alcohol misuse and for the money that they have contributed to research and development.

Various hon. Members asked about taxation and referred to the need for excise duties on mixed drinks to be based on alcoholic content. That is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. During the recent Budget, my right hon. Friend announced a new excise category for mixed drinks, which I understand will be subject to taxation according to alcoholic strength. It is true that some alcoholic drinks—spirits—are taxed at a higher rate due to their alcoholic strength than drinks such as beer and wines. I note what hon. Members said about all alcoholic drinks being taxed equally on the basis of their alcoholic strength. The tax changes that my right hon. Friend has introduced in recent Budgets have significantly narrowed the difference between excise duties chargeable on whisky and other spirits and those chargeable on beers and wines. That is good news for the whisky industry, which is no doubt grateful. I hope that my right hon. Friend will continue to move ahead on that basis.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North dealt with the clauses, I do not need to do so. I think that I have answered hon. Members' specific questions. I have been glad of this opportunity to debate the Bill on its Third Reading. Hon. Members have underlined the importance of the Scotch whisky industry and their pride in it. As I said, the industry has behaved responsibly on the problem of alcohol misuse. We are legislating for a drink that is universally recognised as the hallmark of quality, which is why I am willing to consult anybody about the strength of whisky before it is laid down in the orders.

Whisky is produced in many countries throughout the world, and many countries have long traditions of producing their own distinctive types of whisky to their own standards. Unfortunately, some countries are less concerned over what they permit to be produced and marketed as whisky, and, worse, some permit their so-called whiskies to be marketed in a way that suggests that they are Scotch. The Bill will help to curtail that.

Any fine product is, of course, vulnerable to imitation and to counterfeiting, and Scotch is often attacked in such a way. The industry has been vigorous in identifying and prosecuting imitations and counterfeiters throughout the world and has devoted considerable resources to protecting its product. However, I heard what the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy said about exports of bulk whisky. It will certainly go on doing so with the same vigour in the future, but there is now an undeniable need for some further statutory backing aimed at preventing the production of cheap imitations by opportunists, even in Scotland itself—on the industry's own doorstep.

We all recognise that the great producers depend on their reputation for quality. Production techniques are faithfully preserved, secret recipes closely guarded, and short cuts properly rejected. Added to the tradition is a great deal of mystique. For example, in the making of malt whiskies, I am told that the shape of the pot still is of particular importance. No two pots are exactly the same shape and when they wear out replacements are made to exactly the same design to ensure the same taste to the spirit. No one knows exactly how the shape affects the products, but they dare not risk changing it. That is an example of mystique, if ever there was one.

For all that tradition, the Scotch whisky industry is not hide-bound. It has developed and kept pace with changing tastes and demands. The original single pot-still malt whiskies are still far too strong sometimes for fainter hearts such as I. The lighter grain whisky was produced which, when mixed with the malt whiskies, produced the blended whiskies we all know, such as Johnnie Walker, Famous Grouse, Teachers, Bells, Cutty Sark, Ballantine's and Grant's. There are still pubs all over the world that take a pride in having many bottles of genuine whisky. One can be lucky enough to walk into one in Spain, France or anywhere.

While appreciating the intrinsic virtues of the product —on which we have spoken today—we must not forget the

[Mr. Thompson]

economic importance of the industry. Scotch is exported to nearly 200 markets. Over a third of our exports are now to Europe. Export earnings are now worth over £1 billion per year. The industry is Scotland's largest export earner. I shall not remind the House how much Scotland contributes to the Exchequer. Such facts have been reiterated throughout the morning.

We explained on Second Reading and as we have proceeded through Committee the situation that we face in the European Community, which is considering proposed legislation which defines all the major spirit drinks, including whisky. The whisky definition proposed, and likely to be agreed, quite reasonably reflects the standards of production that prevail in other member states—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members should stop whispering. I would get on quicker if I were left on my own.

However, the proposed regulation also permits Scotch whisky to be defined in our own national legislation to a higher standard, in the same way as it would allow cognac to be defined in French law—I note that my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North is in his place—to a higher standard than the European Community definition for brandy. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that approach of defining the generic products, whisky, rum, brandy and gin, providing national laws are drawn up to meet the existing standards.

There is a great deal at stake here. The solution cannot lie only in stricter controls over labelling. Our domestic labelling laws are not enforceable in overseas markets. *[Interruption.]* I shall miss out the hard bits and get on with the rest. The Bill therefore prohibits the production of whisky in Scotland which does not measure up to the definition of Scotch whisky. It is a severe restriction, but one which is judged to be justified in the new circumstances that are expected to arise when the EEC legislates to define whisky as a generic name.

There is anxiety about minimum alcoholic strength. That excited a great deal of debate in the House and in Committee. Many people would accept a strength below the traditional 40 per cent. alcohol level, and many people sell fine brands of whisky below that strength which are accepted by consumers. Some hon. Members vigorously defend the right of those people to continue marketing their products, and others, including the hon. Member for Moray, argue with equal vigour that Scotch whisky should not be marketed at below 40 per cent. alcohol level.

I emphasise to the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy that my right hon. Friend the Minister has no intention of specifying any minimum strength until he and I have consulted all interests concerned. Indeed, I undertake yet again for the 10th, 11th or 12th time—who cares how often?—that we shall not reach our decision until we have discussed the matter with all interested parties. Moreover, in reaching a decision the Minister will necessarily have to take full account of the position reached on the negotiations in Brussels on the proposed regulation defining spirit drinks. That proposal lays down minimum strengths for all major spirit drinks, so must be taken into account when we eventually decide on the minimum for Scotch.

We have discussed the main provisions of the Bill. I have mentioned the Japanese taxation of spirits and various other protectionist measures, such as those of the Canadian liquor boards. The Bill is fully deserving of the House's approval.

1.27 pm

Mr. Bill Walker: With the leave of the House, I should like to make some comments in reply.

First, I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for his clear explanation and support of the Bill. Sadly, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Mr. Fairbairn) cannot be with us today because he is in hospital recovering from an operation. He would certainly wish me to draw attention to the fact that he is with us in spirit—in all kinds of spirit—and we wish him a speedy recovery. He would also expect me to mention, as others have properly done, our constituency interests. In Perth, he and I enjoy several whisky companies. I have mentioned Bells and Dewars, and I should mention The Famous Grouse, which is equally famous in the marketplace and a fine whisky.

The hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), who told me that he would have to leave because of constituency demands, mentioned how pleasant it was not to be facing me today in my role as the Conservative party's defence spokesman in Scotland. It is equally pleasant for me that today we both agree, as we are not often in agreement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) properly drew attention to the Scotch Whisky Association, which he represents in the House. I thank him for his help and assistance in the preparation and passage of the Bill, and I thank John Hedley and Quintin Stewart who have given me professional advice and back-up, without which it would have been extremely difficult to steer such a Bill through the House. I also thank Colonel Bill Bewsher for his support.

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey), my next-door neighbour—we have adjoining flats—made one of the interesting and good-humoured speeches that we have come to expect from him. His contribution to Scottish affairs and Scottish life is, in many ways, larger than life. One endearing feature of the hon. Gentleman is that, even when he is being rude, he does so with a twinkle in his eye that makes it extremely difficult to fall out with him. He is, indeed, the ideal next-door neighbour. He also knows very well that I keep a stock of Scotch in my flat. Although I do not drink and never have —I make no special claim about that; it is just that I never started—I am not hostile to the practice, as everyone must realise. Many of my best friends enjoy a dram, and the way to enjoy it is in good company. We often do that in the flat.

Let me also say that I agree with the hon. Gentleman's comments on the red book that he and I have found so useful—the one called "Scotch Whisky—Questions and Answers". I shall not attempt to emulate his quotations from Burns, because he is plainly a past master. Certainly, his story about Hampden park is a classic which will be remembered by us all.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) referred to the Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol Etc.) Act 1985, which made it illegal to take alcohol into Scottish football grounds. We know that the events in the story happened before that Act. He mentioned that the issue of blending was brought in as an important amendment to the Bill. He also told us about

the problem of my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) being mistaken for him. I can think of many things over which mistakes could be made, but all that my hon. Friends have in common is their name. Each has his own endearing characteristics, but they are quite different.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. McTaggart) is, after the hon. Member for Kilmarnock, probably the most important chap on the Opposition Benches where I am concerned, as he and I are paired. Whatever he says, therefore, must obviously be of a very high quality, and, as ever, he did not let me down today. He mentioned both the quality of debates in the House and the growth of export sales. The hon. Gentleman's knowledge of what is going on in the industry is very important, and I join him in congratulating the industry on the growth of its export sales. I am sure that both Glasgow, Central and the Scottish whisky industry are in very good hands.

In answer to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) let me say that, if I did not make it clear that I was also congratulating the trade unions on the industrial relations record of the industry, that was entirely my fault. I would not wish to exclude them. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has given me the opportunity to repeat that I consider them a model for other trade unions. We should recognise that all trade unions, and all employers, are neither all black nor all white. There are bad employers and good employers; there are good and bad unions. However, on both sides of the industrial fence, the representatives of the Scotch whisky industry are in many respects a model for other industries, and I have a high regard for both the professionals and the part-timers holding office in the unions.

The hon. Gentleman was right to say that visits to distilleries could be an important aspect of the development of tourism. Blair Atholl distillery in my constituency has a marvellous reception centre, and I commend anyone with visitors from overseas to visit it. They will be extremely well looked after there.

I am delighted to know that my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) is a member of the Fraser clan, and I am sure that Lord Lovat will be delighted to hear that one of his clan is a Member of the House. My hon. Friend suggested that if I obtained a tie for him he would reimburse me. As a good Scot, I would expect to be paid before I handed it over, but I assure him that I will get the tie for him. I am pleased that, as he said clearly during the speech of my hon. Friend the Minister, he is now happy about the matters that he mentioned.

I intervened several times in the speech of the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) to make it clear that I did not intend to suggest that he was not knowledgeable. We recognise his training and expertise. I was not being frivolous when I mentioned Antarctica. I am assured that one of the things that keeps the chaps going in our research station on South Georgia and in other parts of the Antarctica is a wee dram, and it is important that those wee drams are in no way affected by the climatic conditions.

The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) mentioned the Japanese market. As always in such debates, she made an important contribution when she drew attention to the responsibility of the industry with regard to alcohol abuse and the provision of rehabilitation centres. I associate myself with her comments. I have had a lifelong interest in the problems of people with alcohol difficulties. Sadly, it is part of our heritage in Scotland that some people have alcohol problems, but that does not mean that we should be hostile to the industry. The problem is not the spirit, but the individual.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) made a fairly narrow constituency point with which he would not wish me to deal.

I conclude my remarks by quoting my comments on Second Reading which sum up my views and those of many others about Scotch whisky. I said:

"Scotch whisky is more than a whisky. It is part of Scotland's heritage and folklore. It is used as a medicine to cure many ills. As a toddy, it can dispel colds and 'flu. In porridge, it can drive out the freezing cold of Scotland's winters. It lubricates the larynx and helps parties go with a swing."—[*Official Report*, 11 December 1987; Vol. 124, c. 686.]

On Easter Saturday, my daughter was married and we had the best party that I can remember; it went on until midnight. We must thank the Scotch whisky industry for the substantial contribution that it made.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

[Mr. Bill Walker]

Consumer Arbitration Agreements Bill

As amended, considered.

Clause 3

CONTRACTING "AS A CONSUMER"

1.40 pm

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 2, line 18, at end insert—

'but on a sale by auction or by competitive tender the buyer is not in any circumstances to be regarded as entering into the contract as a consumer.'

The intention of the amendment is to resolve the question of the type of arbitration agreements covered by the Bill. As currently drafted, only consumers, as defined in the Bill, are covered, and that remains the intention throughout the Bill.

For the purposes of the Bill, the definition of a consumer has been taken from the Unfair Contracts Terms Act 1977. There is a specific provision in that Act that excludes its application to auctions or contracts made by competitive tender. To ensure that there is a harmonious approach between the Act and the Bill, it is necessary to keep the same form of words. The amendment introduces the appropriate wording to ensure that that is the case.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Being Leader of the Opposition (Fridays), if only for 50 minutes, it is tempting to seize the opportunity to make a long speech. However, it would probably be better for us to restrain our egos. The amendment is a little inelegantly worded, but I see its purpose and support it.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Maude): The amendment seems to be attracting warm support among hon. Members, so I should like to add mine.

The Bill, in rather a short period of time, was subjected to amendments in Committee and on the Floor of the House. As often happens in those circumstances, some subsequent tidying-up became necessary. The amendment falls into that category.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) is right to say that it is desirable that the definition of contracting as a consumer is brought into line with the provisions of the Unfair Contract Terms Act 1977. That is achieved by the amendment and I commend it to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 6

ARBITRATION AGREEMENTS: SCOTLAND

Mr. Pawsey: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 3, line 42 after "cannot", insert

'if it is a domestic arbitration agreement'.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 3.

Mr. Pawsey: To take up the phrase used by my hon. Friend the Minister, this is a further tidying-up amendment. It will be noted that it concerns a clause relating to Scotland. It ensures that the Bill deals only with domestic arbitration agreements that have no international flavour. The position, therefore, in Scotland will be precisely the same as in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Amendment No. 3 is a further tidying amendment and is of a somewhat technical nature. It follows, quite naturally, the preceding amendment and provides for Scotland a definition of domestic arbitration agreements to make effective the preceding amendment.

Mr. Maude: It falls to me to provide the harmony and unanimity, to which we are becoming accustomed with the Bill.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth said, these are two further tidying amendments. They are desirable to put the Bill into proper shape and to speed it on its way on to the statute book. I support the amendments.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 8

CONSTRUCTION OF SECTIONS 6 AND 7

Amendment made: No. 3, in page 4, line 29 at the end insert 'and "domestic arbitration agreement" has the same meaning as in section 1 of the Arbitration Act 1975'.—*[Mr. Pawsey.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

1.44 pm

Mr. Pawsey: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I had not realised that success in a ballot for private Members' Bills would be so demanding. Steering a private Member's Bill is time-consuming and labour-intensive, but it has given me a valuable insight into the workings of the House which I would not otherwise have possessed. Having steered the Bill, with much help from a number of different sources, through Second reading, Committee and Report, I hope that the House will give the Bill its Third reading.

I should like to record my disappointment on one issue, and I shall speak gently, with tongue in cheek. On Second Reading we had the benefit of an extremely knowledgeable speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden). He referred to the fact that he is the author of an extremely helpful book entitled "Bowden on Contracts". I was disappointed to find that, when I went to the Library of the House of Commons to obtain a copy of that admirable book, unfortunately it was not there. I hope that the appropriate authorities will contact my hon. Friend to repair that obvious deficiency.

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): Perhaps I may be of some help. The book is at present going into a second edition and I shall ensure that a copy is available in the Library when it is published.

Mr. Maude: At full cover price.

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend's offer is in keeping with his nature, but I heard the aside of my hon. Friend the Minister who suggested that such a copy be made at full cover price—a Scottish observation, if ever I heard one.

The aim of the Consumer Arbitration Agreements Bill is to enhance consumer protection. At present, it is possible for a consumer to enter an agreement with, for example, a builder or remover and for the contract to include a clause, usually on the back of the agreement and

in small print, which specifies that, in the event of dispute, the dispute will be referred to compulsory arbitation. That is unfair to the consumer, because it takes from him the right to obtain redress from the courts. The Bill will have the effect of drawing the teeth of that clause, and it therefore gives the consumer added rights. The Bill concerns only arbitration between consumers and traders. It does not affect commercial arbitration agreements. It does not relate to arbitration agreements that emanate from abroad.

The Bill as originally drafted gave the consumer the absolute right to pursue his case through the courts. My right hon. and hon. Friends' attitude to that simple proposal was, at best, somewhat reserved. Following discussions with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs, the Bill has been amended and it now operates on three tiers. It provides that where a claim is under £500 the case may be referred by the consumer for consideration by the small claims procedure in the county court. The current limit for such claims is £500. For those claims between £500 and £5,000, the consumer will have the right to take the case to the county court, with a discretion for the court to enforce the arbitration clause. That will enable courts to enforce arbitration in those cases where it is in the consumer's interests to do so. It is worth underlining the phrase, "where it is in the consumers' interests to do so". For sums over £5,000 any arbitration clause written into an agreement and signed by the consumer would stand and be legally binding and enforceable exactly as at present.

I have to be honest and tell the House that I cannot take credit for the three-tier idea. It came as a result of the Bill being referred to the departmental advisory committee on arbitration. That committee, under Lord Justice Mustill, conducted a swift investigation into the merits of the Bill and made its report to the Department of Trade and Industry in a matter of weeks. Together with a number of other interested parties, I submitted evidence to the full committee and I now understand better how Ministers must feel when they are subjected to grilling by a Select Committee. The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) and I serve on the Committee that deals with the Parliamentary Commissioner and it has fallen to us on many occasions to investigate witnesses at some length. I now understand how it feels to be on the receiving end of such an interrogation.

Lord Chief Justice Mustill and his committee listened with courtesy to the various points put to them during the hearing and I freely acknowledge that the Bill is better for their advice, consideration, expertise and recommendations.

On Second Reading, I was accused of introducing a Bill that was the product of the nanny state. I think that that is unfair. I am one of those who voted, in a free vote, for the introduction of seat belts. The introduction of seat belts could perhaps also be described as a product of the nanny state, yet it has saved a great many lives. This Bill, while not saving lives, will undoubtedly save consumers a substantial amount of time, inconvenience, trouble and, not least, money.

It will perhaps help the House if I quote from a letter from the Director General of Fair Trading, Sir Gordon Borrie QC to Lord Justice Mustill. It is a long letter so I shall not weary the House with its full contents. I shall simply refer to a couple of passages. The letter says:

"I see an advantage in the consumer being able to choose between binding arbitration or the court and would not wish to see any inadvertent restriction of this choice."

The letter continues:

"I am aware that some contracts (rather than codes) may contain a compulsory arbitration clause. This practice I oppose because I do not think it desirable for consumers to be deprived of their right of access to the court . . . the Bill, if enacted, would go some considerable way towards assisting my policy goal."

I believe that to be an extremely important and powerful letter from a well-respected organisation, and no doubt the House will give it proper weight.

The reason why I am anxious to reinforce consumer rights is that, in the majority of disputed cases, the consumer is inevitably the weaker party. It seems to me that in all fairness and in all equity the choice of which path to pursue—arbitration or the courts—should lie firmly with the consumer. My reason for that belief is simple. The consumer is usually engaged in legal activity as a once in a lifetime experience and is thus the classic one-shotter, often pitched against a repeat player who is more powerful and more experienced in litigation.

The House will be aware that the trader has behind him not just the possibility of previous experience in the courts but, in many cases, a trade association which is available to provide guidance, advice and expertise. It seems to me, therefore, that the dice are unfairly loaded against the consumer. Additionally, as was pointed out several times on Second Reading, compulsory arbitration can be an expensive process, especially as compared with the small claims procedure, and no legal aid is available.

It has been suggested that the Bill is a sledgehammer to crack a relatively small nut and may be addressing one particular trade. If that impression exists, I am happy to correct it. I have selected three letters from the considerable number received from constituents and others objecting to the manner in which compulsory arbitration clauses work. I have selected these three as being of particular interest to the House. They relate to three different trades and one comes from a trader rather than a consumer.

The first letter, which is addressed to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, reads as follows:

"We are in dispute with a local manufacturer over numerous faults in two settees delivered to us in April 1987."

The letter describes at length the arbitration clause which appears on the back of the agreement and in the usual small print. The letter continues:

"Not only does this clause take away our rights to go to court, it replaces it with an alternative which is a complete unknown as regards expenses and rules, i.e. who pays the cost of Counsel, Solicitors and expert witnesses and the Arbitrator himself? With such experts this could run-up a tidy bill. (A frightening thought!)"

I agree that it is, indeed, a frightening thought.

The letter goes on:

"We now find ourselves in a ridiculous situation whereby we cannot go to court, cannot get our money back and the manufacturers are ignoring us. We have two two-seater settees which we are afraid to use for fear of them being marked or damaged."

The second letter comes from a company of aerial engineers. It reads:

"Dear Mr. Pawsey,

Your Consumer Arbitration Agreements Bill is in the very best interests of the small contractor who does not have and

[Mr. Pawsey]

cannot afford the time nor the staff to defend himself with the aid of his own trade association's arbitration machinery. If I was a big firm, I'd relish arbitration!"

By coincidence, I received the third letter only today. It was addressed to me and it reads as follows:

"My local Member of Parliament Mr. John Hannam has supplied me with copies of your Private Member's Consumer Arbitration Bill."

I shall not mention the name of the company involved because it does not have an opportunity to reply. I shall simply describe it as X. The letter goes on:

"Their advertised claims were false and my goods were delivered as a part load in a loosely packed lorry. There was extensive damage and deterioration caused by damp storage conditions. This was witnessed by an independent assessor and a representative from X. Their subsequent offer of recompense only serves to add insult to injury. I have to accept the arbitration clause does exist even though X delivered my goods without any actual signing of the contract by me. The BAR"—

That is, the British Association of Removers—

"have advised that I cannot take X to court and must use arbitration. Not to be deterred, I pursued the issue of their misleading advertising with the Advertising Standards Authority who discovered that they had judged X's advertising as being unfair back in 1985. I had personally collected copies of this advertising since 1987 and have subsequently submitted it to the ASA. In spite of X's blatant indifference to the ASA ruling I am still advised by BAR that I can only refer the matter to arbitration. Their arbitration clause would appear to allow them to do what they want, including the perpetration of unfair advertising."

Those three cases dealing with different trades underline the necessity for the Bill. When I introduced the Bill I intended it to be a modest and simple measure. Since then, and for the best of reasons, it has become a little more complex than I first anticipated. However, it is still uncomplicated, easy to understand and easy to operate.

I should like to acknowledge the assistance provided by officials at the Department of Trade and Industry who were prepared to draft the amendments to the original Bill. These changes proved to be rather more extensive than originally envisaged because of the necessity to ensure that the Bill referred to Scotland. The majority of the amendments moved in Committee were designed to ensure that the Bill should apply fully and effectively to Scotland. After all, why should the Scottish consumer be less well off than his counterpart south of the border?

It was not possible, as had been envisaged when I introduced the Bill, for it to apply to England and Scotland with precisely the same wording. It is evident that, because of the differences between the legal systems in those two parts of the United Kingdom, a different approach to Scotland was necessary. That was to ensure that the Bill applied there just as it does in England. For that reason only, separate clauses referring to Scotland now appear in the Bill. For that I have to thank those who advise the Government on Scottish affairs for their work in drafting the appropriate clauses about Scotland.

As I have said, the Bill may be a little more complicated than originally intended. If it is to provide a reasonable balance between consumer and trader and to provide legislation covering the whole of the United Kingdom, the amendments moved and agreed in Committee and subsequently on Report are necessary.

The Bill now enjoys the support and, I think, the blessing of the Department of Trade and Industry. I am delighted to see my hon. Friend and neighbour the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs in his customary place on the Front Bench. I pay tribute to him for his help and guidance and, not least, for his forbearance. The Bill is indeed the better for his advice. I cannot help thinking that, to some extent, my hon. Friend has acted as a midwife in the general development of the Bill. He may seem to be an unlikely character for such work, but I assure the House that he has a sensitive and helpful touch.

Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones (Vice-Chamberlain to Her Majesty's Household): Steady on.

Mr. Pawsey: I shall not pursue the matter further.

Although the Bill has been regarded as my baby, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary has certainly been the midwife. In the future, I am sure that he will become known as Mr. Secretary Maude, but I shall always think of him as Mr. Midwife Maude!

May I also thank the Chairman of Ways and Means for his help in conducting the Bill through the Committee stage that was taken on the Floor of the House, something that I believe is unique. Without his kindly and expert assistance I would not be moving the Third Reading today.

If the House approves the Third Reading the Bill will proceed to the other place, and I am optimistic that it will receive a reasonable degreee of support and enthusiam, if only because the Bill had its origins there in 1977 during the passage of the Unfair Contract Terms Act 1977.

The Bill enjoys the support of the Consumers Association and I acknowledge the help that has been so freely made available to me by its legal adviser, Mr. David Tench. The Bill also enjoys the support of the Institute of Trading Standards Administration, the Office of Fair Trading, as well as the Department of Trade and Industry. With such support the Bill has a respectable pedigree.

The Bill enhances consumer protection in an area where there has been some abuse. It extends the principle of fairness, increases choice and helps to redress the imbalance between the consumer and the supplier. It does not take away anyone's rights, because the right of arbitration remains, albeit in a permissive rather than an obligatory form. I commend the Bill to the House.

2.7 pm

Mr. Gerald Bowden: I should like to commend the Bill to the House and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) on the aplomb with which he has piloted this legislation towards the statute book. I also congratulate him on the clarity of his advocacy in presenting the purpose and merits of the Bill.

The Bill is a further step in an honourable course of law towards the protection of the weak against the strong, the protection of the small consumer against the big battalions of industry and commerce. The Bill follows a tradition that draws from every aspect of law-making. It follows from judge-made law, notably the contribution of Lord Denning, towards the protection of the consumer in contracts and statutes made in this House. That progress has now produced this private Member's Bill, which is one further step in the right direction.

The purpose of law is not merely to regulate society, but to make sure that justice is done. There is a definite feeling that injustice occurs when a small consumer deals with a

big operator and when a one-off transaction for one person is a multi-purpose transaction for another. The Bill seeks to redress that inequity.

I am conscious that the promoters of the Bill have been accused of denying the right of choice and of ousting arbitration as opposed to litigation as a means of redress. That is not the case. Arbitration has a place and a part to play in any form of resolution of disagreement. It is appropriate that, in cases in which proponents are of equal contracting status—for example, if they have some trade secret that they do not wish to publicise or some dispute that they wish to keep to themselves, most notably building contracts and insurance contracts—disagreements can most efficaciously be solved by arbitration. But the system has been misused. Cheapness, efficiency, speed and privacy have been misused by many operators to try to exploit their rather superior contracting powers against consumers.

For that reason, the Bill has a notable part to play. I hope that it makes swift progress to the statute book. I say that with a certain point in mind. My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth was kind enough to refer to a text in which I have some interest. That text now approaches its second edition. I should hate this legislation, which makes such a contribution to consumer affairs, to be omitted from that second edition. For that, if for no other reason, I commend it to the House for swift enactment.

2.10 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell: One would not recognise it from our sober, sombre expressions, but this is 50 minutes of pure pleasure for many hon. Members, not only because the Scots are now out of the way—that is always pure pleasure—but because I can now slip into my role as Leader of the Opposition (Fridays). That role is now from 1.40 pm to approximately 2.30 pm. That is pure pleasure for me.

Today's proceedings are an example to the House of Commons. Indeed, if my speech is brief, at this pace we shall probably have time to consider another three Bills. That is a much better pace than that at which the Scotch whisky measure was dealt with. It is certainly an example to the Government. If the Government were to propose less controversial, silly legislation and adopted more sensible measures such as this, which we can get through at great speed, we would be much happier and would serve the purposes of the people much more effectively than we do on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) on bringing forward the Bill. It is a great achievement to get a private Member's Bill through the House. We assume that there will not be many obstacles in the House of Lords and that the Bill will go through today. It is a satisfying achievement, and it applies to far too few hon. Members. The hon. Gentleman was successful because he made a wise choice of measure. He had the good sense to work with the Consumers Association and, particularly, its legal officer, David Tench. Over the years, he has probably been responsible for better legislation than that produced by the Department of Trade and Industry. Because of their enormous circulation and wide range of contacts in the community, David Tench and the Consumers Association have the gift of spotting gaps in the legislative framework and developing small measures that are necessary to improve the lot of ordinary people, particularly the consumer—the Government have neither the time nor the insight to do that—and introducing them through private Members' legislation. Having worked with them is one of the hallmarks of the hon. Gentleman's success.

The measure is important. It protects the weak from the strong and the small against the big battalions. That is a major part of the function of the House. We are certainly furthering that function today. The hon. Member's measure completes the achievements of the Labour Government from 1974-79. Had it not been for the particularly tough political climate and the obstructive operations of the Conservative party at the time, the measure would have come into effect in 1977. It was frustrated then only by the tactics of the then Opposition. It is not the final chapter of the history of that Labour Government—I have not yet completed my book on it—but it rounds off their achievements. It is an important measure, simply because, although effective, the arbitration procedure is expensive. It is really designed for weightier causes than those of the small consumer. The British Association of Removers estimated the cost at £200 a day, and if the individual loses he carries the cost of arbitration. Therefore, it is right to take the smaller cases out of the arbitration procedure. If it has the added advantage of dealing a severe blow to the legal profession, so much the better.

The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth said that the Minister was the midwife. I am not sure that I like the image, but we must not forget that the main part of the achievement was his. I hope that that is not considered to be male chauvinism. On Second Reading the Minister embraced the Bill and threw caution to the winds. An agreed modification was made in Committee that narrowed the Bill's scope somewhat, and I should have preferred that that had not happened. However, I understand the pressures to get the Bill through its passage.

I am glad that the proposals put forward by the British Association of Removers were not accepted. It made a deeply moving—I make that pun for the second time, and it has gone down as badly as it did the first time—plea for low-cost, but still compulsory arbitration. The small claims procedure is good and effective and we are delighted that it is being extended to Scotland. We urge that the limits be raised to £1,000, as was proposed in the Lord Chancellor's consultative paper. We do not understand why that is being delayed. The sooner that it happens, the better. In the meantime, this measure will provide an important and useful procedure. The House has spent on it the best-employed 50 minutes of its time.

2.17 pm

Mr. Maude: It is a pleasure, as well as a tradition, warmly to congratulate my hon. Friend the member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) on his skilful piloting of this measure through its Commons stages. I am sure that it will be equally skilfully handled and dispatched in another place. It is a somewhat different measure from what it was at its birth. My hon. Friend said that I was the midwife. It has undergone some transmutation since then, and it is now a more acceptable measure.

My hon. Friend has been both temperate and sensible and has consulted fully my Department and outside

[Mr. Maude]

interests. That has undoubtedly lent the measure a helpful degree of consent. My hon. Friend may not have achieved the fame or notoriety of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), but he has made real progress towards putting his Bill on the statute book.

As has been said, the Government are not unsympathetic towards the Bill—indeed, they have assisted in its passage. Since its birth two months ago, it has grown at the hands of the parliamentary draftsman and his Scottish colleague, with the result that the Bill sensibly reconciles the competing principles at stake. On the one hand, as now amended, the Bill will prevent arbitration clauses being used as an unfair means of dissuading consumers with genuine claims from pursuing their disputes. On the other hand, however, it should avoid unnecessary interference with arbitration, which the Government have no wish to discourage as a mechanism for resolving disputes.

It will not surprise my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth if I say that I retain, in a small part of my mind, an anxiety about the principle pursued in the Bill. I do not believe that it is being unduly legalistic to support the principle that parties to a contract should be bound by the explicit terms of that contract. That is an honourable and important principle, which is important for the cause of justice about which the hon. Member for Great Grimsby spoke. It is also an important principle in the pursuit of fairness. In the ordinary course of events it is perfectly fair that parties to a contract should accept that they are bound by the terms of that contract. The principle that one should allow the courts and the legislature to overset the explicit terms of a contract, even in highly restricted circumstances, needs to be treated with great caution. For those reasons, it is right that the Bill should be restricted in its ambit to exactly the mischief that has been identified, but that it should go no further than that.

I retain an anxiety that the more that the courts and the legislature interfere, overset and override explicit terms of contracts, the less the onus appears to be upon consumers to read the terms of the contract to which they are committing themselves. We all make jokes about fine print on contracts and about how unfair it is, but most of us will accept that we are bound by the terms of contracts, which may be set out in fine print. We accept that we should read what the contract says before accepting it. It is no good the consuming public becoming accustomed to the fact that if they sign up for something which afterwards they do not like, the courts will intervene to help them.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: In a sense, the Minister is praising with faint damns because that is an unduly legalistic interpretation. We must take into account the relative weight of the parties. If a consumer is in a weak position and the person putting forward the contract is in a strong position, the odds are not equal. That is the main consideration by which we should be motivated.

Mr. Maude: With respect, it is not a narrow legalistic approach, it is a broad philosophical approach, which I am happy to say, is entrenched deep in the fabric and history of English law.

Mr. Mitchell: That is a conservative approach.

Mr. Maude: Well, it may be a conservative approach, but I make no apology for that. Certainty in the law is highly desirable, and the principle that one should be bound by the terms of a contract that one signs should be overset only in very restricted circumstances.

It may help the House if I comment briefly on the Bill as now drafted. Clause 1 provides that an arbitration clause cannot be enforced against a consumer without the consumer's consent if the proceedings would fall within the jurisdiction of a county court. In other words, it covers disputes up to the present county court limit of £5,000. If that figure rises in the future, the new limit will automatically apply to the Bill.

The next two clauses apply certain exclusions and definitions to ensure consistency with the Unfair Contract Terms Act 1977 and other statutes.

The effect of clause 4 is to give the court the discretion to enforce an arbitration clause in county court disputes if they are above the small claims limit—in other words, disputes between £500 and £5,000 at present. The court may exercise that discretion only if it is satisfied that arbitration would not be detrimental to the interests of the consumer, having regard to all the relevant factors, including the availability of legal aid. Clause 4 does not give the court discretion to enforce an arbitration clause if the dispute falls within the small claims limit, which is at present £500.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby asked whether the limits would be increased. The consultation paper issued by the Lord Chancellor's civil and justice review canvassed the possibility of raising the limit of the small claims jurisdiction and of removing the general county court limit altogether. Although an increase in the level of the small claims limit could be made by statutory instrument, the removal of the county court limit altogether would require primary legislation and could not be implemented for at least two or three years. We accept that if the small claims limit is raised it would be reasonable for the new limit to continue to apply to this Bill. If the county court limit were to be removed entirely, the Bill would be one of a number which would require consideration whether it should be amended. I doubt whether we need to anticipate that possibility now.

Some specific illustrations may help to elucidate the Bill's effect and rationale. Let us suppose that I wish to sue a trader for £200 in the small claims court, but he wishes to enforce an arbitration clause. The maximum cost of proceedings in the small claims court is £43, but the cost of arbitration would depend on the scheme specified in the contract. It could be as high as £200 or £300 if I lost. The Bill would allow me to insist on suing the trader in the small claims court and would give the court no discretion to enforce the arbitration clause. Clearly, if the trader could insist on arbitration and the arbitration scheme was an expensive one, I might well be discouraged from pursuing the dispute because the potential costs would be too large in relation to the sums at issue.

Perhaps I wish to sue the trader in court for £2,000. That sum exceeds the small claims limit and the case would therefore fall within the normal procedures of the county court. The Bill allows the court discretion to enforce the arbitration clause in cases of this financial magnitude. But if I was eligible for legal aid for the court proceedings, it is unlikely that the court would enforce the arbitration clause against me because at arbitration I would not receive legal aid and a reference to arbitration, relatively speaking,

would be detrimental to my interests. I am assuming that there are no compelling technical or other reasons for preferring arbitration.

If, on the other hand, I was not eligible for legal aid at the court proceedings, it is possible that, on application from the trader, the court would enforce the arbitration clause. Indeed, it is possible that if I tried to resist the reference to arbitration in the county court and was unsuccessful, I might run up costs in addition to those associated with the arbitration. I would obviously be well advised to consider carefully whether it was likely to be worth my while seeking to take advantage of the Bill's provisions before I risked incurring extra expenses in court.

The Government do not wish the Bill to interfere with arbitration to the extent that it allows the consumer to insist on court proceedings in cases where the operation of the arbitration clause would not cause him unfairness.

Finally, let us suppose that I wish to sue a trader for £20,000. The Bill would not affect such a dispute because the sum is above the county court limit. My Department's advisory committee on arbitration law took the view that there was no case for allowing arbitration clauses to be overturned in cases involving sums of this amount, and I share that view. The terms of a contract for this amount should have been carefully considered by the parties before signature and I do not see the case for allowing a consumer to overturn his contractual agreement in these circumstances. Moreover, my Department's advisory committee received no evidence that arbitration clauses in contracts for large sums in practice operated unfairly.

Clauses 6 to 8 contain provisions for Scotland similar to those for England and Wales and for Northern Ireland in the earlier part of the Bill. The main difference arises because there is no direct equivalent in Scotland to the £5,000 jurisdictional limit of the county court. The Bill is restricted instead to cases falling within the summary cause process of the sheriff court. At present, that extends the proceedings for debt or damages not exceeding £1,000.

The provisions for Scotland are slightly different from those for the rest of the United Kingdom. If experience shows that this is an anomaly which gives rise to unfairness or indeed that any of the limits defined in the Bill are unsatisfactory, it will be possible for the Secretary of State with the concurrence of the Lord Chancellor or Lord Advocate, as appropriate, to specify higher limits by order.

The Bill strives to ensure that the consumer is not deprived of access to justice by means of arbitration clauses. At the same time, it seeks not to interfere unnecessarily with arbitration, which is an efficient dispute resolution procedure of great value in helping to reduce the work load of the courts. As amended, it achieves a good balance, and the Government do not wish to oppose it.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Private Member's Bill

COMPANIES (POLITICAL DONATIONS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Not moved.

TRANSPLANT NOTIFICATION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 8 July.

ENVIRONMENT AND SAFETY INFORMATION BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned Debate on Second Reading [5 February.]

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for a junior Government Whip to block a Bill in this fashion when the Government themselves have said that the Bill is a worthwhile measure that may well do some good?

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is not for me to distinguish between a junior and a senior member of the Government, but it is perfectly in order for an hon. Member from the Government Front Bench to object to the Bill.

Mr. Smith: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I name Friday next for continuation of Second Reading?

Debate further adjourned till Friday next.

SMOKE DETECTORS IN HOUSES BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not printed. Second Reading what day?

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): With the leave of the hon. Member concerned, Friday 6 May.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 6 May.

COAL MINING SUBSIDENCE (DAMAGE AND ARBITRATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): Friday next.

Hon. Members: Now.

Mr. Meale: Now.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is too late. Friday next has already been named.

Second Reading deferred till Friday next.

RIGHT OF PRIVACY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 8 July.

COAL MINING SUBSIDENCE (PREVENTION AND PUBLIC AWARENESS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Meale: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Bill has come back to the Floor of the House a number of times, and it seems that the House spends an inordinate amount of time trying to delay or stop private Members' Bills of this type from coming forward. Today, only two Bills have managed to come forward. I think that at least my constituents—and the many constituents of other hon. Members on both sides of the House who suffer from the effects of subsidence damage from coal mining—should have the right to know the names of those who have objected to the Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I understand the hon. Gentleman's frustration, especially in view of the area that he represents, but I cannot at this time allow speeches that are in fact debating the issue.

Mr. Meale: In that case, Madam Deputy Speaker, Friday next.

Second Reading deferred till Friday next.

MYALGIC ENCEPHALOMYELITIS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Objection taken.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. First, I must express my deep feeling of outrage that the Government Whip, the hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones)——

Hon. Members: Order.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am in the Chair. I remind Ministers that I am the one to call order. Will the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) sit down?

Mr. Hood: My point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, is this. As the promoter of the Bill, can I seek your advice? The Government Whip acts on behalf of the Government. Will he tell the House whether he is acting on behalf of the Minister in opposing the Bill? If so, let me tell him that he has betrayed the hundreds——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Again, I perfectly follow hon. Members' frustrations when they have worked hard on a Bill of this nature, but this is not the moment to debate it.

Second Reading deferred till Friday next.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Will you confirm that it is in order for any hon. Member to object to any of these Bills being passed without debate and, indeed, without disclosing either their identities or their reasons?

Will you also confirm that there is no reason in the Standing Orders of the House why any hon. Member should not volunteer at that stage or indeed later, not only his identity, but—particularly if he is a Minister, by letter to the hon. Member in charge of the Bill—the reasons for his objection to the Bill's being taken without debate?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I could not have put it better myself. Therefore, I have no intention of repeating exactly what the hon. Gentleman said.

UNFAIR REPORTING AND RIGHT OF REPLY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 6 May.

SCOTTISH CONSTITUTION (REFERENDUM) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday next.

COMPANIES (AUDIT COMMITTEES) BILL

Read a Second Time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House. *—[Sir Brandon Rhys Williams.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that this is a most unusual procedure, but as there is no objection I am willing that it should go ahead.

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams (Kensington): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You said that this was an unusual procedure, and I think I owe the House an explanation. I have tried to introduce a measure along these lines during every Session since 1970——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. No explanation is necessary now. We are all very familiar with the fact.

Mr. Chris Smith: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Can you confirm that the procedure through which we have just been on an excellent and worthwhile measure, going through all stages at once with no debate, would have been open to any of the other Bills that were listed for consideration today? Will you draw the attention of the Government to the restraint shown by Opposition Members on this matter? Perhaps the Government will show similar restraint in relation to equally worthwhile measures introduced by Opposition Members.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that many of the Bills have not been printed. We could not have gone through the business with the speed that we have shown today if that had not been the case.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Perhaps Opposition Members have not worked quite as hard as my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Sir B. Rhys Williams), who has been involved——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We are all aware of how hard the hon. Gentleman has worked, and his Bill is quite familiar to us. It has been before the House on a number of occasions.

HORSES, PONIES AND DONKEYS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 6 May.

House of Commons Members' Fund

2.39 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I beg to move,

That in pursuance of the provisions of Section 3 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948 and of Section 2 of the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981 the maximum annual amounts of the periodical payments which may be made out of the House of Commons Members' Fund under the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1939, as amended, and the annual rate of any payments made under Section 1 of the said Act of 1981 shall be varied as from 1st April 1988 as follows:

(a) for paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the said Act of 1939, as amended, there shall be substituted the following paragraph:

1. The annual amount of any periodical payment made to any person by virtue of his past membership of the House of Commons shall not exceed £2,556 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring his income up to £4,703 per annum whichever is the less;

Provided that if, having regard to length of service and need, the Trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £4,929 or such sum as, in their opinion, will bring his income up to £7,076 per annum, whichever is the less:

(b) for paragraph 2 of that Schedule there shall be substituted the following paragraph:

2. The annual amount of any periodical payment to any person by virtue of her being a widow of a past Member of the House of Commons shall not exceed £1,281 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring her income up to £3,428 per annum, whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to her husband's length of service or to her need, the Trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £2,463 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring her income up to £4,610 per annum, whichever is the less:

(c) in paragraph 2A of that Schedule for the words 'the annual amount of any periodical payment' to the end of the paragraph, there shall be substituted the words:

'the annual amount of any periodical payment made to any such widower shall not exceed £1,281 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring his income up to £3,428 per annum, whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to his wife's length of service or to his needs, the Trustees think fit, they make a larger payment not exceeding £2,463 or such sum as in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring his income up to £4,610 per annum, whichever is the less:

(d) in Section 2(1) of the said Act of 1981, for the words from the beginning to the end of paragraph (b) there shall be substituted the words:

'the annual rate of any payments made under Section 1 shall be—

(a) £1,488 if the payments are made to a past Member; and

(b) £744 if the payments are made to the widow or widower of a past Member."

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this it will be convenient to take the second motion on this subject.

That the whole or any part of the sums deducted or set aside in the current year from the salaries of Members of Parliament under Section 1 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1939, and the whole or any part of the contribution determined by the Treasury for the current year under Section 1 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1957, as amended by the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981, be appropriated

[Madam Deputy Speaker]

for the purpose of Section 4 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948, as amended by Section 12 of the Parliamentary Pensions etc. Act 1984.

Mr. Morris: The motions stand in my name as chairman of the managing trustees of the House of Commons Members' Fund and those of right hon. and hon. Members, who share with me the responsibility, as fellow trustees, for administering the fund.

The purpose of the first resolution is to provide for an increase in the present levels of grants and payments which may be made under the Members' Fund legislation. These were last revised in April 1987 and we propose to increase them, from 1 April 1988, by approximately 4·2 per cent. in line with the increases approved from this month for public service and state retirement pensions.

Unlike those of us who now have superannuation benefits as of right, former colleagues who left the House before 1964, and their widows and widowers, have no pension entitlement. They are a dwindling number and many of them live in straitened circumstances, not least some of those who are now of advanced years and their dependents, but the help which my fellow trustees and I are able to provide from the Members' Fund is extremely modest.

One of our problems is that the whereabouts of our former colleagues, or their widows or widowers, is not always known to us. I shall be most grateful, therefore, if right hon. and hon. Members could get in touch with me if they become aware of any former Members or their dependants who need help. I make that appeal especially to our new colleagues if they know of cases in their constituencies.

I need not detain the House at length today, since the provisions for which the trustees seek approval are set out in detail in the resolutions on the Order Paper. These can be briefly summarised as follows. Paragraph (a) deals with the provision for grants to ex-Members. Here it is proposed to increase the basic annual grant to £2,556, subject to an income limit, including the grant, of £4,703. In the case of ex-Members with longer service who need help from the fund, the grant may be increased to a maximum of £4,929, subject to an income limit of £7,076.

Paragraphs (b) and (c) deal with provision for grants to the widows and widowers of ex-Members. It is proposed to increase the basic annual grant to £1,281, subject to an income limit, including the grant, of £3,428. Similarly, in the case of widows or widowers of ex-Members who had longer service and need help from the fund, the grant may be increased to a maximum of £2,463, subject to an income limit of £4,610.

Paragraph (d) refers to the "as of right payments" from the Members' Fund to ex-Members who had 10 years' service before October 1964, and to widows and widowers of such Members, provided for by the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981. It is proposed to increase these annual payments to £1,488 in the case of ex-Members and to £744 in the case of widows or widowers. The additional annual cost of the above increases is estimated to amount to £5,300.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Obviously, every hon. Member is interested in the Members' Fund because we all pay into it. What is the current income of the fund?

Mr. Alfred Morris: It is £204,600, including hon. Members' contributions at £24 per annum, the grant in aid and gross income from investments. If there is any further information that my hon. Friend, or indeed any other hon. Member would like me to provide, I shall be glad to help if they will write to me.

The second motion relates to section 4 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948 which authorises the trustees of the Members' fund to make

"such periodical or other payments as they think fit"

to ex-Members, or the widows, widowers or children of ex-Members, for

"the purpose of alleviating special hardship".

This section of the Act, together with section 1 of the 1957 Act, as amended by section 3 of the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981 and by the Parliamentary Pensions etc. Act 1984, provides that this House may in any year by resolution direct that there shall be appropriated, for the purpose of the section, the whole or any part of the current year's contributions of Members plus the whole or any part of £22,000 of the current year's contribution by the Treasury.

Members' contributions amount to approximately £15,600 per annum and with £22,000 of the Treasury grant, give a total of £37,600 per annum. As of now, eight grantees receive payments totalling £10,230 per annum under this section and the moneys to be appropriated are needed both to continue these payments and to fund any further cases which may arise.

Finally, I wish to record our warm appreciation to Mr. J. L. G. Dobson, Mr. F. W. Brewer and their colleagues in the Fees Office for their skilled and unstinting help to the trustees and for their humane concern for those whom we seek to serve. I commend the motions to the House.

2.46 pm

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I said earlier that there is an obvious interest in this matter for Members of Parliament because we all contribute to the fund to help those people in need. It is necessary, on behalf of Members and the people who benefit from the fund, to thank those who work hard, especially my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and his colleagues. I thank also the fund's administrators—the people who do not sit in this place—who work very hard too. That work is in the interests of all of us.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That in pursuance of the provisions of Section 3 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948 and of Section 2 of the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981 the maximum annual amounts of the periodical payments which may be made out of the House of Commons Members' Fund under the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1939, as amended, and the annual rate of any payments made under Section 1 of the said Act of 1981 shall be varied as from 1st April 1988 as follows:

(a) for paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the said Act of 1939, as amended, there shall be substituted the following paragraph:

1. The annual amount of any periodical payment made to any person by virtue of his past membership of the House of Commons shall not exceed £2,556 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring his income up to £4,703 per annum whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to length of service and need, the Trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment

not exceeding £4,929 or such sum as, in their opinion, will bring his income up to £7,076 per annum, whichever is the less:

(b) for paragraph 2 of that Schedule there shall be substituted the following paragraph:

2. The annual amount of any periodical payment to any person by virtue of her being a widow of a past Member of the House of Commons shall not exceed £1,281 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring her income up to £3,428 per annum, whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to her husband's length of service or to her need, the Trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £2,463 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring her income up to £4,610 per annum, whichever is the less:

(c) in paragraph 2A of that Schedule for the words 'the annual amount of any periodical payment' to the end of the paragraph, there shall be substituted the words:

'the annual amount of any periodical payment made to any such widower shall not exceed £1,281 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring his income up to £3,428 per annum, whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to his wife's length of service or to his needs, the Trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £2,463 or such sum as in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring his income up to £4,610 per annum, whichever is the less:

(d) in Section 2(1) of the said Act of 1981, for the words from the beginning to the end of paragraph (b) there shall be substituted the words:

'the annual rate of any payments made under Section 1 shall be—

(a) £1,488 if the payments are made to a past Member; and

(b) £744 if the payments are made to the widow or widower of a past Member.'

Resolved,

That the whole or any part of the sums deducted or set aside in the current year from the salaries of Members of Parliament under Section 1 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1939, and the whole or any part of the contribution determined by the Treasury for the current year under Section 1 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1957, as amended by the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981, be appropriated for the purposes of Section 4 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948, as amended by Section 12 of the Parliamentary Pensions etc. Act 1984.—[*Mr. Alfred Morris.*]

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Bearing in mind the information given by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) about objections to private Members' Bills, may I ask that you direct that the Conservative Members concerned inform me in writing as to the reasons for objecting to those Bills?

Madam Deputy Speaker: There is no Standing Order by which I can direct any hon. Member to do any such thing.

Mrs. Manchanayake (Children)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Garel-Jones.*]

2.47 pm

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): I welcome this opportunity to bring to the attention of the House the case of my constituent, Mrs. Manchanayake and her two children, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for giving up his Friday afternoon to reply. I know that he has taken a close personal interest in this case.

Mrs. Manchanayake was born in Sri Lanka in 1954, but came to England in 1965 and has lived here ever since. Sadly, she was born deaf and therefore depends to a large extent on others to be her advocates. She is now a British Citizen. In 1974, she married and had two sons, now aged nine and eight, and called, somewhat confusingly, Alick and Alex. The marriage was not a success, and, again sadly, there was violence—both to Mrs. Manchanayake and to the children. I understand that her husband has a conviction for carrying an offensive weapon. In November 1986, her husband left the family home in Acton to live with another woman in Perivale. In February 1987, Mrs. Manchanayake applied to the courts for interim custody of the children, which she was awarded. Her husband appealed against the interim custody, but lost. Both the school report and social services report supported the mother's application. A neighbour gave evidence at the hearing and supported allegations of violence by the husband. None the less, the husband was granted access to the children every other weekend. The interim custody order was challenged by the husband and was due to be heard in September last year. In the meantime, the children were made wards of court. The father made no financial contribution to the children's upkeep during this period. He exercised his right of access to the children on 18 July, but never brought them back. Probably using illegal documents, he took them to Sri Lanka. The older boy's passport is still here; the younger one never had one. They have remained in Sri Lanka ever since.

The children do not speak the language. Their education has, of course, been wholly disrupted, and severe emotional damage has been done as a result of their forcible separation from the parent with whom they were living. For her part, the only meaningful relationships that the mother had have ended and she is even more isolated than she was.

To the mother's credit, she has done all that she can to get her children back. She flew to Sri Lanka in October, returning in January. I have seen her on several occasions since her return and the news is depressing. It is likely to be four to eight years before the action that she has initiated in the Sri Lankan courts is heard. Friends and relatives are paying for the barrister and her air fares. The children are not living with their father any more, but now live in what their mother describes as "digs" with strangers —70 miles from their father. They seem to have the minimum of supervision, and certainly lack the love and affection of a close relative. They desperately want to come back here. The father is out of work and apparently also unhappy at living in Sri Lanka. He dare not come back here in case he is arrested and is contemplating going to Canada. What will happen to the boys if he does is not clear.

[Sir George Young]

Until January, the boys attended no school in Sri Lanka. They are now attending school, but, of course, this is in Sri Lankan. If too much times elapses before their return to their home country, they will have lost valuable time at our schools. In cases such as this, children are often told by their fathers that the mother has abandoned them and does not want to see them again. After a time, in this case, that propaganda may come to be believed. Children of this age—eight and nine—become bewildered, distressed, aggressive and simply do not know who to believe or what is happening.

Mrs. Manchanayake has turned to me as her Member of Parliament for help. I have been in touch with the Lord Chancellor to see whether we can get legal aid for her case in Sri Lanka, with the Home Secretary because of the offence of child abduction in breach of the court order, and with the Foreign Office, which represents the interests of British citizens overseas.

Again, it is not, I fear, a happy story. Let us remember that we are talking of two British citizens taken against their will from the only country that they have known, in breach of the order of a British court. Surely Her Majesty's Government can help.

Legal aid is not available to British citizens to pursue a case such as this one in a foreign court. The Home Secretary might be able to do something if the father returned to this country, but he is not going to do so. The Foreign Office reaction is best captured by a quote from the letter that my hon. Friend the Minister wrote to me on 23 December last year:

"I am afraid that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office cannot intervene in what is primarily a family dispute."

My hon. Friend went on to say that Mrs. Manchanayake must apply for custody through the courts in Sri Lanka because that is where the children are. But the children may be adults before that case is heard, and in many countries, the local laws give all rights to the father. The only action that my hon. Friend mentioned in his letter was an unofficial approach through our high commission out there for a welfare report. He said that he would let me know the outcome of such an approach, but nearly four months later, I have heard no more, so I assume that nothing has happened.

My hon. Friend will know that I expressed disappointment at what I described as a feeble response. In his last letter, dated 26 January, in reply my hon. Friend simply confirmed the rather depressing news that he had already conveyed. The Sri Lankans regard the children as Sri Lankans as well as Britons, so we cannot intervene officially . Sri Lanka has not ratified the relevant Hague and European conventions on child abduction, so the procedure set up under that protocol cannot be activated.

I have also approached the Sri Lankan authorities, contacting a contemporary of mine at Oxford, who was deputy Foreign Secretary there, as well as the Justice Ministry and the Supreme Court to see whether the case might be expedited, but I have had no reply from any of them.

Is my hon. Friend really saying that, confronted with this manifest injustice and the human suffering that goes with it, there is no action that Her Majesty's Government can take but to ask for a welfare report? Why cannot our high commissioner in Sri Lanka take the issue up at a senior level with the Sri Lankan Government instead of just asking for an unofficial welfare report? Sri Lanka is a friendly Commonwealth country with close links with the United Kingdom and behind whose Government we have firmly stood in their present difficulties. Why cannot my hon. Friend talk to the high commissioner here about the case? The Foreign Office rightly gets upset about the flouting of our car-parking laws in London. How about some protests about shielding child abducters? The crime simply does not seem to rate a high priority. What pressure are we putting on Sri Lanka to do as other civilised countries are doing and to ratify the relevant convention? Why can we not ask for the case in the courts to be expedited on humanitarian grounds?

I am sure that if—perish the thought—my hon. Friend's children were illegally abducted, he would be jumping up and down until they were returned, and rightly so. These are British children, too, and their mother, who cannot plead their case herself, looks to me and to this House to get her children back. In a moving article on this subject in *The Guardian* last month, Polly Toynbee made it clear that political pressure can be and has been used, and with success. I hope to be in touch with Mrs. Manchanayake later today. What can I tell her that the British Government are doing for her children?

2.56 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tim Eggar): It is especially appropriate that we debate this particularly sad case with you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, in view of your long connection with Sri Lanka, and I very much respect and admire the way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) has followed this case through so closely on behalf of his constituent.

It is an extremely sad case and I have every sympathy with Mrs. Manchanayake. Sadly, it is not the only such case that has come to our attention. I hasten to add that the others relate not to Sri Lanka but to various other countries. I have to deal with almost all the consular cases which come to the Government's attention, and there is no doubt that cases which involve the splitting of families, often in circumstances similar to those described by my hon. Friend today, are tragic in their consequences, both for the parent who often is left in this country, and for the children.

If it were possible to take action to alter the circumstances in this or any of the cases at present on my desk, should immediately seek to do so. I shall consider carefully the detailed points made by my hon. Friend today and look again to see whether there are areas that he has pinpointed in which we can take action. I shall write to my hon. Friend on the subject early next week.

Sadly, we must recognise that there are an increasing number of marriages between British and foreign nationals that go wrong. The increase in marriages between people of different nationalities may result, in part, from the rapid growth and ease of international travel. Where marriages cross national boundaries, the partners may have different cultural and religious backgrounds and different traditions which can lead to strains and stresses in the family unit. The break-up of a marriage, as with other domestic disputes, is essentially a family matter. Similarly, the decision about the custody of any children should primarily be a family decision. If the

family cannot reach a mutually agreeable solution, it is for the British courts, not the Government, to decide what should happen to the children.

While the children are in the United Kingdom they are, naturally, subject to British legislation and the jurisdiction of British courts. Once abroad, the children are removed from British jurisdiction and are subject to the jurisdiction of the country in which they find themselves. The children's return to the United Kingdom can then be achieved only through the courts of the country to which they have been taken. We are constrained, however regrettably, by the basic fact that courts in one country have no obligation to recognise custody orders made by the courts of another country. That is the very real and fundamental problem that we cannot overcome.

That problem has been recognised by the international community, and two conventions have recently been brought into being to remedy the problem. They are the Hague convention on the civil aspects of international child abduction and the European convention on recognition and enforcements of decisions concerning custody of children and on the restoration of the custody of children. These were implemented in the United Kingdom, when the Child Custody Act 1985 came into force, as recently as 1 August 1986.

These conventions are a major step forward. Of course, they apply only to those countries that are signatories to them and they are mainly, but not all, Western nations. We are using our best efforts to persuade other countries to become signatories to these important instruments. For example, in 1986, at the Commonwealth Law Minister's conference in Harare, the United Kingdom presented a paper on the conventions. It was agreed at that meeting that they represented the best way forward. We have also prompted discussion in the European Community. Our embassies abroad make regular inquiries of host Governments about ratification of the conventions. We hope that eventually as many countries as possible will become signatories. Of course, the conventions also cover children who are abducted to this country.

These two conventions provide that each country that ratifies them must establish at least one central authority to be responsible for the administration of the conventions. The 1985 Act provides for the establishment of two central authorities in the United Kingdom: for Scotland, it is the Secretary of State for Scotland, and for England, Wales and Northern Ireland it is, as my hon. Friend has said, the Lord Chancellor.

Since the 1985 Act and when the conventions came into force in the United Kingdom, the Lord Chancellor's Department has become a focal point for people requiring information, advice and assistance about child abduction. I am told that the Department has received details of about 150 cases involving children who have been abducted or who are in danger of being abducted both to and from the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton may be interested to know that so far 17 children have been returned to the United Kingdom. They have come from Portugal, France, Australia, Switzerland and Cyprus. In the Cyprus case, it took a year simply to find the child.

Sir George Young: Can my hon. Friend say whether the welfare report to which he referred in his letter to me of 23 December was ever received by the high commission, and whether the high commission has been in touch with the children in any way since they arrived? Has my hon. Friend any up-to-date information on their condition? Is his Department in touch with them?

Mr. Eggar: I shall return to that specific case towards the end of my speech.

In the Cyprus case, for example, it took a year to find the child. In addition, 18 children have been returned to their homes abroad from this country. A number of cases did not go to court because the parents were able to resolve their differences amicably.

The Hague convention was drafted to deal with the immediate problem of abduction. It requires the summary return of the child to the country of its usual habitual residence so that custody can then be decided in the courts of that country. Under the Hague convention, a court order does not need to be in place for legal procedures to start, although that can expedite processes.

Under the European convention, an enforceable order issued by a court must exist for the legal process to begin. It can be made subsequent to the child's abduction. A number of countries have already signed the two conventions and West Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands and the United States have said that they intend to ratify either one or both of the conventions.

Signatories to the convention, however, may make reservations and sometimes they can be significant. Spain —where a number of British children are involved—has made the reservation that it is not bound to recognise custody orders made after the date of the abduction.

When children are taken to countries such as Sri Lanka, which are not signatories, no international framework exists within which the return of children can be pursued. That is one reason why we urged at the Commonwealth Law Ministers meeting, that all Commonwealth countries should become signatories. Action can only be taken through the courts of that country which may or may not take account of the existence of any British court order in respect of the child. Diplomacy or the work of consular officers abroad have, sadly, a limited role only in the fate of a contested child. Just as the British Government have no influence on the workings of the judiciary of the United Kingdom, so we cannot be expected to have influence on the workings of a court in a foreign country. Indeed, it would be improper for the British Government to seek to interfere in the administration of justice in a foreign sovereign state.

There is a further complication. Most children of a marriage between people of different nationalities acquire the nationalities of both parents. In those cases where children have dual nationality and are in the country of their second nationality, as in the case in Sri Lanka, we and our embassies or high commissions are prevented by international law from making formal—I stress formal —representations to the Government of that country. Such children are viewed as being in their own country and are subject to their own country's law. There is a note to that effect at the back of all British passports.

I would not wish to paint too negative a picture in setting before the House constraints on the type of assistance that we can offer. Ratification of the Hague and European conventions is just one of the positive steps that we have taken to provide a framework for the return of abducted children. Our consular officials will try to be as

[Mr. Eggar]

helpful as possible in practical ways to a parent separated from a child. It is possible that they can act informally on behalf of a parent.

Consular officials are under instructions in such cases to provide lists of local lawyers to enable a parent to pursue their case through local channels; secondly, if asked, as they have been in the case described by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton, to try to obtain a report on the child's welfare from the local authorities. I should add that that can often be a difficult and lengthy process and is solely dependent on the co-operation of the loyal authorities. Thirdly, consular officials are instructed to give any assistance that they can in connection with granting access to children including, if necessary, offering a room where a meeting with the children can take place; fourthly, officially or unofficially, to draw to the attention of the local authorities information about British court orders affecting the children; fifthly, to do what they properly can to help to bring about a speedy conclusion to any legal proceedings dealing with the child's custody; and, sixthly, to approach the local authorities for help in tracing abducted minors.

I shall now return to the particular case that has been raised by my hon. Friend. The two children find themselves caught up in just the sort of situation that I have described. They are wanted in two homes by their separated parents, and those parents are 5,000 miles apart.

As my hon. Friend said, despite a court order in favour of Mrs. Manchanayake, their father took them to Sri Lanka in July 1987. Our high commission in Colombo reported to us on 31 August that Mr. Manchanayake had taken the children, allegedly on false documents, as my hon. Friend mentioned. Our high commission cannot take action formally—I stress formally—with the Sri Lankan authorities for the return of Alick and Alex. They will have acquired Sri Lankan nationality by descent from their father. Therefore, they are citizens of Sri Lanka and subject to the laws of Sri Lanka. They are, of course, subject to the jurisdiction of Sri Lankan courts. Unfortunately, Sri Lanka is not one of the signatories to the relevant conventions, despite the fact that, at Harare, we brought to its attention the desirability of signing such conventions. Mrs. Manchanayake must therefore continue to pursue custody through the Sri Lankan courts. Only the courts can decide the issue. A local lawyer is best placed to advise Mrs. Manchanayke on local procedures and how she can best present her case.

My hon. Friend is aware also that we cannot make legal aid available for legal proceedings that take place outside the United Kingdom. That is because the significant number of arrests and detentions involving British nationals worldwide would involve us in considerable expense. For instance, in 1987, 1,400 Britons were in detention at any one time. We could not contemplate taking on the considerable financial burden that would be entailed in making legal aid available overseas.

I sympathise with Mrs. Manchanayake and the many other families who find themselves in similar circumstances. Our high commission has approached the Sri Lankan authorities informally on Mrs. Manchanayake's behalf to obtain a welfare report on her two children. The reason why I have not followed up my December letter with further information is that we have not had a reply to our request for a welfare report, despite the fact that we have reminded the authorities about that request.

I shall ensure that the record of the debate is made available to the relevant officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Colombo. I shall also write to our high commissioner in Colombo, reinforcing the need that he and his staff should follow up the case on every available opportunity with the Sri Lankan authorities.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way and for the fullness of his explanation. Is he saying that the high commission authorities have not visited the boys and that they do not know where they are?

Mr. Eggar: I shall recheck the matter and if I am incorrect, write to my hon. Friend, but my understanding is that they have not been directly in touch with the boys; they have had contact, in so far as there has been contact, only through the Sri Lankan authorities. I am afraid that that flows directly from the point that I made earlier. They are of dual nationality, they are in the country of their second nationality, and, therefore, our consular officials have no authority and no standing to intervene. I am afraid that that is a problem that we get into throughout the world.

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend said that they are Sri Lankan citizens. They were born here, they are British citizens, they were at school here, and they have been taken out of this country illegally, in defiance of a British court order, yet the British high commission in Sri Lanka, whose job it is to look after the interests of British citizens, has not made contact.

Mr. Eggar: I tried to explain to my hon. Friend that, when in Sri Lanka, they are regarded by the Sri Lankans and, indeed, by the British Government, because of the international conventions, as being not British citizens but Sri Lankan citizens. If the two boys had been taken to any country other than Sri Lanka and we were asked to contact them and take up their case directly we could do so. That procedure has been agreed internationally and must be adhered to.

I stress again that we will do everything that we can on an informal basis. I will ask our high commission to take a personal interest in the case, and a record of this debate will be passed to the Sri Lankan authorities. I shall keep my hon. Friend in touch with matters as, I hope, they develop.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 18 April 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Disabled People

1. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding facilities for the disabled on public transport.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Peter Bottomley): We often receive representations. We work with the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee, with transport operators and authorities, and with vehicle designers and manufacturers to improve facilities for disabled people.

Mr. Fearn: Is the Minister aware that disabled people are being trapped in the London Underground, mainly because there are no notices at the top of escalators? They go down into the tube and then the escalators cease to run. A few weeks ago, 11 up escalators were not in service. Will the Minister confirm that he will do something about that? Will he also consider whether disabled people can be catered for when the Channel tunnel rail link is started?

Mr. Bottomley: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, I am sure that he will have contacted London Regional Transport direct, and perhaps we may take the matter from there.

The Channel tunnel will be a railway tunnel, and British Rail has made massive improvements in its facilities for disabled people. Both British Rail and the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee deserve to be congratulated.

Mr. Wigley: Will the Minister confirm that British Rail, in making those tremendous improvements, which I recognise, is made aware that disabled people have a need for toilets as well as seats? Will he discuss that point when opportunities arise? Will he confirm that the committee has links not only with railways and buses but with taxis and aeroplanes?

Mr. Bottomley: Yes. I ought to pay tribute to those who serve on the Baldwin committee, because they bring a great deal of expertise and concern to bear and provide assistance to the advisory committee and to the Department's disabilities unit. The nationalised industry operators and other private operators would do a great deal better to pay more attention to what is said on behalf of the disabled. People with mobility difficulties make up about 10 per cent. of the population.

Domestic Air Fares

2. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with interested parties about the level of domestic air fares in the United Kingdom.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Paul Channon): None. Fares on domestic services are effectively deregulated. The Civil Aviation Authority intervenes only to prevent anti-competitive pricing on these services.

Mr. Darling: Is the Secretary of State aware of the widespread concern at the escalating cost of air fares within the United Kingdom, both from the point of tourism—I speak here of British holidaymakers who face add-on costs when they go abroad as well as the disincentive to foreign visitors to visit parts of the United Kingdom other than London—and of regional development? Is the Minister further aware that unless something is done about high air fares there will be a disincentive for firms to move away from London, which is not something that I would have thought the Government would welcome?

Mr. Channon: The advantages of the competition policy that has been pursued for the past few years means that there is now more choice on many provincial services. There are now four operators on the London to Edinburgh route and six airlines have applied for licences to take over the B-Cal route. We shall have to see what happens, but I entirely agree that it is important that fares should be kept as low as possible. One new advantage is the recently introduced Apex fare, which goes some way towards meeting the points that the hon. Gentleman makes.

Aviation Safety

3. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he intends to make any improvements in aviation safety during the next year.

Mr. Channon: The Civil Aviation Authority is responsible for regulating aviation safety. The authority will be investing £200 million over the next five years. That includes the replacement of the main air traffic control computer, which I recently approved, and the progressive introduction of a computerised air miss alert system.

Mr. Battle: In view of the recent near misses and the projected increase of air traffic over the summer holiday period, has there not been serious under-funding on computer development? Can the Minister assure the people of this country that safety will take absolute priority over competition in aviation policy?

Mr. Channon: I can certainly give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. As to the first part of his question concerning computers, the Government have provided the funding for which the CAA has asked. The matter is now proceeding and I hope that there will be substantial improvements.

Mr. Wilkinson: Following the near accident at Gatwick airport recently, will my right hon. Friend discuss with the CAA and the BAA the adequacy of the airport as it is presently configured? Will he consider building a proper runway there so that aircraft do not have to use the taxiway as an alternative when the main runway is closed for repair?

Mr. Channon: I shall consider that suggestion. I share hon. Members' worry about congestion in airspace in the south-east. The problem is not confined to Gatwick. I asked my officials some time ago to collaborate with the CAA and the BAA to produce a forecast of air traffic demand in the south-east and the capacity required to meet it.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the Secretary of State completely satisfied with air safety over the new City airport, which is in the London borough of Newham? Does he agree that, to restore some public confidence in air safety over London, it would be in everybody's interests if he initiated a full public discussion, through some form of inquiry, so that representations from all interests could be made? Does he agree that public confidence might be restored in that way?

Mr. Channon: I hope that the hon. Member will play his part in restoring public confidence. The House will be aware that the number of air misses that pose a danger to the public has declined dramatically in the past few years. There were only 16 in 1986, and I should be surprised if the provisional figures for 1987, which are not yet available, showed an increase. There is a later question about London City airport, but, in case it is not reached, I should say that it is matter for the CAA, which is satisfied that the operation of the airport is safe.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, at the beginning of the peak season in air travel, it is irresponsible to put about groundless scares? While near misses must always be a matter of concern, if we consider the number of passengers who are carried it is clear that air safety has improved dramatically during the past 10 years, which is contrary to the impression that getting into an aeroplane is somehow dicing with death.

Mr. Channon: I entirely agree. All the statistics bear out what my hon. Friend says. Nevertheless, I am in no way complacent about the matter. Any risk is serious. The CAA and all other relevant authorities will continue to pursue measures to make air travel even safer. I have already mentioned the new computer, and the air miss alert system is being investigated. The CAA is involved in a whole host of measures to make air travel even safer. My hon. Friend is entirely right. All the published figures and all the evidence of the past 10 years shows that the number of air misses has declined substantially.

Mr. Rees: Will the Secretary of State discuss with the appropriate authorities the curious arrangement whereby an aeroplane that is coming in to land at Gatwick in certain circumstances lands on the taxiway? Did someone plan for that, or did it have to happen because of an emergency?

Mr. Channon: The right hon. Gentleman does not put it quite fairly. The main runway is receiving necessary maintenance, which will take some time. During night hours, therefore—when the airport is less congested—the taxiway is being used. The runway must be maintained at some time. The CAA and the BAA think that this is the right time and the right way in which to do it. If either organisation or I were worried about safety, we would take measures to stop the work.

Mr. Wheeler: Bearing in mind the tragedy at Manchester, can my right hon. Friend say when he hopes the CAA will report on the specification of safety hoods?

Mr. Channon: The CAA hopes to finalise the specification for smoke hood's by the end of this month. It will then wish to consult widely other aviation authorities to establish whether it would be a good idea to make hoods mandatory.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Nobody wishes to scaremonger, but is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there is widespread concern as air misses are reported almost every day? Although we appreciate the investment that the right hon. Gentleman has agreed, will he have urgent talks with the CAA and anyone else concerned to establish whether the investment can come to fruition much sooner than the five years he mentioned? It is quite clear that we cannot wait that long to get the matter right.

Mr. Channon: I am in continual touch with the CAA, which has prime responsibility for these matters. It is as anxious as I am to speed up the process as much as it possibly can to improve the main air traffic control computers. I shall continue to have discussions with the CAA.

The hon. Gentleman uncharacteristically exaggerates when he says that there is an air miss every day or so. In the past few weeks there have been approximately eight or nine incidents. We do not yet know how many of those involved risk to the general public, but the general figures do not appear to be very much out of line with what has happened in past years.

Abandoned and Untaxed Vehicles

4. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to simplify procedures for the removal by local authorities of abandoned, unroadworthy and untaxed vehicles.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are considering whether procedures for removing abandoned vehicles can be simplified. Local authorities have no powers to remove unroadworthy or untaxed vehicles.

Mr. Bowis: Will my hon. Friend consider two points in particular, among the many things that one can do, to improve the situation? First, will he consider initiating discussions with the DVLC and local authorities to see whether we can speed up the transfer of information from the DVLC, which can take 10 seconds for the police, but three weeks for local authorities? Secondly, will he consider the possibility of deeming cars which do not bear tax discs to be abandoned? There is nothing more infuriating for the law-abiding taxpayer than to see cars outside his home, alongside his own car, without any such tax discs.

Mr. Bottomley: My hon. Friend will know that the North report covers some of those points. The Government will be considering their response to the recommendations.

I accept my hon. Friend's suggestion about a discussion on a simple way for local authorities to check with the DVLC. I think he will accept that it is necessary to have some degree of confidentiality in respect of personal records held at Swansea.

Mr. Cryer: Does the Minister accept that lack of public transport encourages people to use their cars excessively, so that elderly cars become unroadworthy and become the old bangers which are the subject of the question? Does he agree, therefore, that abandoned cars in the Yorkshire

dales national park are a particular eyesore? Should he not come to the House as soon as possible to make an urgent statement that the Settle-Carlisle railway will be retained?

Mr. Bottomley: It has always struck me as rather odd that the hon. Gentleman should ask for a Minister to come to the House as soon as possible when he is already here and answering questions.

It is far more likely that the abandoned cars were abandoned by those, especially in the London area, who, in growing numbers, have moved to public transport. That is a sign of the success of our policies.

Warrington (Bus Services)

5. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has about the level of bus services in Warrington since deregulation.

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): The level of bus services in Warrington is about the same as it was before deregulation, but with improvements in some areas.

Mr. Butler: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a lesson to be learnt from Warrington borough transport, which, with excellent trade union support, has increased its route mileage from 1.7 million to 3 million, its passenger fleet by 65 per cent. and its staff by 50 per cent. since deregulation?

Mr. Mitchell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for illustrating yet again the advantages that flow from deregulation.

In addition, I notice that there is increased frequency on the No. 18 bus service, run by Warrington borough transport, and the No. 19 has been increased in frequency from one an hour to two an hour. Those are further indications of the substantial benefits brought by deregulation.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The next time that the Minister is on a No. 18 or No. 19 bus in Warrington, perhaps he would care to consider that, although Warrington may be a success story, according to the Association of Metropolitan Authorities' recent report on deregulation, patronage is down everywhere else—by 3 per cent. in the shire counties and by one third in Merseyside. Why has only Warrington made a success of deregulation?

Mr. Mitchell: That is simply an indication that the hon. Gentleman is wholly out of touch with what is happening on the ground. Throughout the country there is about the same level of service as there was before. Increased mileage is being run and, moreover, the savings to ratepayers amount to £40 million a year.

In addition, because of the removal of the over-heavy hand of regulation, one now sees minibus services sprouting in 250 areas throughout the country.

Motorways

6. **Mr. Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of motorway are currently under construction; how many miles are planned to be built in the next five years; and how many miles have been completed in the last five years.

Mr. Channon: Over 160 miles of motorway construction and improvement have been completed in the last five years. Almost 60 miles are under construction. We are today announcing several additions to our road programme, including our decision that the Blackburn southern bypass will be built as a motorway. This brings our motorway construction programme to 150 milles over the next five years.

Mr. Chapman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that many more miles of motorways or motorway standard roads are needed if we are to have an adequate and modern road system? Does he further agree that, by and large, motorway building brings great safety and environmental benefits to the community as a whole, even if some people in local neighbourhoods are adversely affected? Does he agree that the priority in his road-building programme should be to remove voluminous and heavy vehicles from many inadequately designed roads within the centres of residential areas?

Mr. Channon: Yes, I agree with a great deal of what my hon. Friend has said. That is why we have such a large motorway programme. Of course, some of the points raised in the latter part of his question can be solved by bypasses, for which we also have a large programme. For the speed of communications that businesses want increasingly, it is extremely important to have better and faster communications, and that means more motorways and trunk roads. It is also a great help to safety, because motorways are by far the safest roads in the country, and I am sure that the House will have been pleased to see that the recent provisional road statistics show that casualties are very much down.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: What is the Government's policy on motorway tolls? Is any work being done in the Department on toll stations being placed on the existing motorway network, and does the Minister have any proposals for tolls on roads to be built in the future?

Mr. Channon: I am looking at all ways of encouraging private sector infrastructure, but I certainly have no plans for putting tolls on existing roads.

Mr. Simon Coombs: The House will undoubtedly welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement today about further expenditure on motorways. Does he agree that there is an appalling waste of time and resources on overcrowded motorways on the present network? Will he tell the House what plans he has to look at the widening of existing motorways—apart from the M25—particularly the M4 east and west of the M25, which every day constitutes a major aggravation for many thousands of motorists trying to reach London?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The growth of road traffic has meant that some of the motorways are no longer as adequate as they were to deal with the enormous amount of traffic on them. We shall keep that under review. It makes it all the more important that we should continue with a proper programme of building motorways and trunk roads so that we can deal with the increasing problems.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my right hon. Friend accept that in my constituency we are grateful for the excellent standards of motorways, which enable businesses to come readily to Lancaster and tourists to come to our lovely city? But we want not only motorways: we want motorway links. Will my right hon. Friend please consider seriously the M6 link?

Mr. Channon: I was rather nervous about my hon. Friend's question. I thought that there would be a sting in

the tail. I shall certainly consider anything that he puts to me. I have opened one motorway link in the past few months. We have that very much in mind as well. It is a question of priorities as to how one spends the money in the roads programme. All I can say is that the roads programme of £3 billion over the next five years is enormous by anyone's standards. It is far higher than in the past, and we shall look at all proposals.

London Underground

8. **Mr. Boateng:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to make additional financial provision for improvements in safety standards on the London Underground.

Mr. David Mitchell: We await proposals from London Regional Transport for any additional expenditure which may be necessary as a result of the lessons learnt from the King's Cross fire. These will be carefully considered during this year's investment and financing review.

Mr. Boateng: Did the Minister or the Secretary of State receive any advice from the railway inspectorate, either before or after the tragedy at King's Cross, about the need for further investment in safety by London Regional Transport? Can he assure the House, in the light of widespread concern, particularly among users of the Metropolitan, Jubilee and Bakerloo lines, that any necessary investment will not await the outcome of the report, but will be put in hand immediately?

Mr. Mitchell: The answer to the first question is no. The answer to the second question is that London Underground is planning 50 per cent. more investment in real terms next year than in 1984-85, the last year for which the GLC had responsibility. Moreover, it is planning to spend this year the equivalent of 45 per cent. of its turnover on investment. I do not know of any other corporation in the country that is planning to invest on that scale.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Will my hon. Friend consider the problems of muggings and other crimes of violence, including robbery, that take place on underground stations and trains late at night, particularly on trains with no guards? Sometimes a train is virtually empty, so people cannot move to a carriage that is occupied.

Mr. Mitchell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing attention to this matter. We have provided an additional £15 million to fight crime on the London Underground. Recently, I had discussions with the British Transport Police to see what can be done to learn the lessons of the effective changes that they have made on the southern end of the Northern line and to employ them elsewhere.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Will the Minister not be so defensive as to answer questions different from those that he has been asked? The question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) related specifically to investment in safety, but the Minister chose to answer about general investment programmes. Is he aware that on 19 November, the day after the King's Cross disaster, I asked the Secretary of State whether LRT would consider quickly the lessons to be learnt from that disaster, make any necessary investment, and take action immediately rather than wait for the report to be finished? Is it not sad that five months later my hon. Friend and other hon. Members should be asking the same question about how seriously LRT takes safety? Will the Minister meet LRT and Sir Keith Bright so that no further criticisms can be made at the inquiry about lackadaisical attitudes to safety?

Mr. Mitchell: I think that, unintentionally, the hon. Gentleman is being a little unfair. I assure him that I have had meetings with Dr. Ridley about this subject and received assurances that anything deemed to be necessary for safety will not be held up by LRT's management until the completion of the inquiry.

Aircraft (Fire Safety)

9. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he or the Civil Aviation Authority has made of the fire safety implications of considerable quantities of duty-free alcohol being carried aboard large passenger aircraft; if he will examine the feasibility of siting duty free shops in arrival lounges only; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Civil Aviation Authority is responsible for air safety regulation. It says that there is no evidence that carrying duty-free alcohol on passenger flights is in itself dangerous. We do not propose to review the siting of duty-free shops.

Mr. Dalyell: With regard to the Civil Aviation Authority, Christopher Tugendhat writes:

"Nevertheless, we would be happy to see any international moves to eliminate its carriage, such as may happen in the EEC over the forthcoming period."

That quotation was from a letter dated 15 April. Can the discrepancy about the CAA's attitude be cleared up? How much sense does it make to have 500 bottles of booze in the cabin of a jumbo jet during an emergency, bearing in mind the risks with regard to fire and weight?

Mr. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman does not provide any discrepancy when he reads out the letter from Christopher Tugendhat. Clearly, if 500 bottles are not being carried there could be a saving of £12,000 a year, and that point was made in "The Green Capitalist," which was reviewed in the *New Scientist*. The important point is that where there is a safety risk the CAA takes action, but where there is not, it does not.

Tyres

10. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of tyres tested on motor vehicles in use have a tread depth below 1·6 mm; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This information is not available.

Mr. Gregory: I am slightly surprised by my hon. Friend's comment. Should not the United Kingdom be moving towards a minimum tyre depth of 1·6mm, which has been adopted in a number of countries and proposed as a minimum tyre tread depth for the European Community, bearing in mind that Government car tyres must be changed when they reach a tread depth of 2mm? My hon. Friend is treating United Kingdom citizens with rather less grace than those who travel in Government cars. Further, will he consider the whole width of the tyre tread, rather than a proportion of it? Will we continue to put lives at risk?

Mr. Bottomley: My hon. Friend knows perfectly well that we are not putting lives at risk. He knows perfectly

well also, as does the tyre industry, that in this country we have safer tyres than most other European countries, as the MOT test detects not only defective but worn tyres. It is not true that the Government car service replaces tyres when the tread reaches a depth of 2mm. Research shows that the present tyre regulations produce the required safety standards.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Minister may want to reconsider his answer. The hon. Member for York (Mr. Gregory) is right to say that it is necessary to take into account the whole width of the tyre tread. to improve safety standards. Why will the Minister not come clean with the House and accept the overwhelming case for moving to a minimum tyre depth of 1mm across the whole of the tyre?

Mr. Bottomley: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman meets me to discuss in detail the discussions that I had with the tyre industry about 18 months ago, during which we considered research evidence about cars' cornering ability in addition to the information that we already had about cars' breaking ability. I think that the hon. Gentleman's fears would then be set aside.

Mr. Waller: Will my hon. Friend resist attempts to force conformity upon us, when it has been shown clearly that spending extra money and imposing extra costs on motorists will not bring commensurate benefits in road safety?

Mr. Bottomley: I agree with my hon. Friend. We should concentrate our efforts on aspects of the vehicle, as well as driver and road safety, that produce results. That is how we achieved the lowest death rate since 1954. It is one reason why our safety standards are the highest in the European Community. It is right that we should continue doing what works rather than just what is asked for in the House of Commons or meets a ministerial prejudice.

Rail Electrification

11. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of British Rail to discuss plans for further rail electrification.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend is always happy to discuss electrification if the chairman so wishes, but I understand that British Rail has no current plans for further major route electrification.

Mr. Madden: Will the Minister arrange an early meeting with the chairman of British Rail and drop some heavy hints that if the chairman submits an application to electrify the Bradford to Leeds line the Minister will smile upon it? Does the Minister agree that failure to electrify that line would represent economic insanity? Does he understand that many people in Bradford note that insanity, especially as they were recently told that if the line was not electrified shiny new electric engines would be brought into Bradford behind diesel locos? Will the Minister tell the chairman of British Rail that the retention of the Wortley curve and electrification would give the Bradford people, at long last, the opportunity of a fast, efficient, safe and comfortable rail service from Bradford to the rest of the country?

Mr. Mitchell: I understand that British Rail has already examined the case for electrification of the line from Leeds to Bradford and concluded that the costs far outweighed potential benefits.

Mr. Adley: Is not the reason why BR has not come forward with any further major electrification proposals the fact that it cannot meet the Government's extremely tight investment criteria? Will my hon. Friend consider that point? Will he confirm that under section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987 the Secretary of State has ample powers to authorise additional electrification programmes in connection with the Channel tunnel? Will my hon. Friend confirm that it remains the Government's priority to provide the distant regions in particular with the best modern rail links to that system?

Mr. Mitchell: It is pointless, if an equally good service can be provided by diesels at lower cost, to go for electrification en principe. As for section 40 and Channel tunnel expenditure, I remind my hon. Friend that the Act requires that expenditure to be wholly commercial and not subsidised.

Dr. Marek: Will the Minister admit that it is clear nonsense that the Bradford to Leeds line should not be electrified under the present scheme, and similarly that it is nonsense that services to cities such as Chester and Wrexham should be not be electrified to the west coast main line at Crewe and that the Blackpool line should not be electrified to the west coast line at Preston? Will the Minister get British Rail to consider producing a detailed analysis of the schemes in terms of investment and its estimate of the extra revenue and extra passengers so that we, the public, and the House, can judge?

Mr. Mitchell: British Rail proposes electrification when it sees it as worth while. I do not have in my head all the cases listed by the hon. Gentleman, but I recall that the Blackpool to Manchester proposal would have cost £12 million—I think that is the correct figure—and the saving would have been one minute on a journey. The hon. Gentleman fails to recognise just how efficient the modern diesels are, especially the Sprinter services which British Rail is introducing.

Mr. Sackville: Will my hon. Friend give an assurance that there will be a direct and efficient rail link between the Channel tunnel and the north of England so that we get some of the benefit of that huge investment?

Mr. Mitchell: The linkage between the Channel tunnel and north of London on the east and west coast main lines has always featured as part of British Rail's proposals.

Mr. Vaz: Is the Minister aware that Leicestershire county council has commissioned a report on the electrification of the London to Leicester line? Is he further aware that Leicestershire county council, Leicester city council, Nottinghamshire county council, Derby city council and Sheffield city council all support the idea of an electrified line between London and Leicester? What advice does he propose to give to those local authorities and commuters, who wish the line to be electrified as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman should not assume that there are automatic substantial benefits from electrification. I remind him that his line, with its HST-125s, is faster than the west coast main line, which has been electrified.

Mr. Snape: Does the Minister not understand that the electrification of the lines between, for example, Bradford and Leeds, and for that matter, Glasgow and Edinburgh, which is demanded by my hon. Friends and others, is being

held up because the schemes fail to meet the criteria laid down by the Department? They fail to meet those criteria because all the schemes are treated in isolation instead of being treated as part of a national rail network. The hon. Gentleman made a comment about the £12 million cost of electrifying the line between Manchester and Blackpool. Can he tell the House how much the M55 motorway between the M6 and Blackpool cost, and whether it was built in isolation or as part of a national motorway network?

Mr. Mitchell: British Rail runs a national network and it is up to British Rail to decide what form of locomotion it uses to operate most effectively. I know that the hon. Gentleman would like British Rail to go out on a spending spree, like a drunken sailor, but I remind him that when his Government were in office the average annual spend in real terms was £41 million, whereas under the Conservatives it has been £72 million.

London City Airport

12. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received regarding the operation of the London City airport.

Mr. Channon: None, Sir.

Mr. Taylor: The Minister has answered earlier questions about the increased congestion of the skies over London and the dangers associated with that, which were certainly not promised when the City airport was being praised by the Government. Furthermore, regional links that were promised, such as the link to Newquay and the now abandoned Plymouth link, have not been given their proper value. Does the Minister agree that not only does the City airport appear to have failed to fulfil its promises, but that efforts should now be turned to promoting regional airports in the different areas of this country?

Mr. Channon: I cannot imagine why the hon. Gentleman should want to knock the London City airport. I am in favour of developing both regional airports and the London City airport. As I understand it from the operator of the line, the reason why the service to Plymouth is not in operation is that it has not been a commercial success. A great many other services can be operated from London City airport. It is a safe airport and I hope that it will flourish.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my right hon. Friend advise the House of the planning situation with regard to the operation of the only jet aeroplane which, to my knowledge, is capable of operating from the STOLport in Docklands, namely, the BAe 146? If those inhibitions were removed, would not the commercial potential of this fine airport be very much greater?

Mr. Channon: I had better not comment on that, because such an application would possibly come to me for approval. Any suggestion of a change to allow jet aeroplanes to fly from the airport would require a variation of the existing planning approval.

Travelcard and Capitalcard

13. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates are available to him of the effect which the introduction of the Travelcard and Capitalcard has had on the volume of traffic and level of congestion in London.

Mr. David Mitchell: No reliable estimates are available, but Travelcard and Capitalcard are believed to have been significant in increasing the use of public transport in London and can be expected to have released capacity on the road network.

Ms. Ruddock: I thank the Minister for that reply. I believe that Capitalcard and Travelcard must, indeed, have assisted in removing congestion. We Londoners very much appreciate that and are therefore extremely worried about the possibility that Travelcard and Capitalcard may no longer exist if bus deregulation comes into force. Will the Minister guarantee that Capitalcard and Travelcard will continue if bus deregulation should occur in London?

Mr. Mitchell: When we bring forward detailed proposals for bus deregulation in London, there will be ample opportunities for substantial debate. I am sure that the hon. Lady would not want me to pre-empt her opportunities.

Coaches (Safety)

14. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer of 7 March, *Official Report* column *98*, what further measures he intends to introduce to improve safety for coach users.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We intend to require new coaches to meet European standards for the flammability of coach interiors, the strength of coach seats, and anti-lock braking.

Mr. Cran: Notwithstanding what my hon. Friend has said, does he agree that even after 1 October, in a roll-over, most coach passengers will be unrestrained and will be injured by broken glass from the side windows? If the Consumers' Association is correct in saying that the provision of restraints for all passengers would add 1·7 per cent. to the cost of the coach, does he agree that that would be money well spent and that the Government should encourage it?

Mr. Bottomley: I shall be happy to discuss that with the British Coach Council. The important point is to try always to deal with the most likely causes of crashes. While pursuing greater coach safety, it is worth remembering that travelling by coach is much safer than travelling in one's car.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Teesside Crown Courts

75. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Attorney-General when he next intends to visit Teesside Crown courts.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): I have no present plans to do so.

Mr. Devlin: Is my hon. and learned Friend aware that a visit from him is long overdue, because in Teesside Crown court the victims of crimes have to wait in the same waiting area as those who may have attacked or assaulted them? I should be grateful if he could find time to come to Teesside and put forward some proposals to improve the situation.

The Solicitor-General: I sympathise with my hon. Friend and I think that I have some good news for him. New Crown courts are currently under construction in Teesside and are due for completion early in 1991. These will provide 12 new courtrooms with 28 witness and

consultation rooms and, particularly pertinent to what he said, a separate witness waiting suite with its own toilet facilities.

Mr. John Morris: Is the Solicitor-General aware that despite his good news for Teesside, which I welcome, another problem that will remain in Teesside and in many other courts is the absence of dock officers? When a custodial sentence has to be passed, the presiding officer has to send a message to his clerk to ensure that a dock officer is present. A similar situation pertains in magistrates' courts when there are no policemen present. Unhappily, one of these days a great tragedy will occur because no one will be present to search even a defendant on bail before he is arraigned. That is a real problem in our courts.

The Solicitor-General: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his welcome for the substantial new court building programme that is in train. I recognise the problem to which he refers and, of course, it is in part unfortunately exacerbated by the industrial action in the prison service. Attention is being given to that.

Crown Prosecution Service

76. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will visit the east midlands regional office of the Crown Prosecution Service.

The Attorney-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): I next plan to visit the offices of the Nottinghamshire area of the CPS next month. There is as yet no east midlands regional office.

Mr. Allen: When the Atorney-General visits the office, when it is in existence either in Lincoln or in Nottingham, will he pass on congratulations from his Department on the excellent service that it provides in the area? Will he learn from the prosecuting solicitor service that preceded it and re-examine the salary scales for people in the Crown Prosecution Service so that they can be brought up to the standards in that area? Will he ensure that there is no further extension of the acquittal rate by the Crown Prosecution Service because it is stretched and cannot prepare its cases properly, and often insufficient evidence is presented when the case comes to court?

The Attorney-General: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he said at the outset of his supplementary question. Last month I paid a short and informal visit to the Nottinghamshire office and I wholly endorse what the hon. Gentleman said about its standards. I can tell him that the Treasury has recently made an offer to the unions representing the great majority of lawyers in the Crown Prosecution Service that would secure a substantial rise in pay with immediate effect. I am confident that this will lead to a marked improvement in recruitment to the service and will better reward those who have worked with such commitment, including those in the hon. Gentleman's area, since the creation of the service.

Mr. Hind: My right hon. and learned Friend's comments on the improvement in remuneration for staff are greatly appreciated. What long-term effect does he envisage that improvement will have on recruitment and morale in the Crown Prosecution Service? Many Conservative Members are concerned about that.

The Attorney-General: I think that everyone understands that there is a shortage of lawyers generally—*[Interruption.]* It may be thought that there are too many lawyers in the House, but there is a shortage generally. The Crown Prosecution Service must compete in that environment. I have visited about half the CPS areas, spending a whole day in each. The increased pay now on offer from the Treasury will have an encouraging effect on recruitment and, just as important, on retention.

Mr. Vaz: Does the Attorney-General agree that one way to solve the crisis in the Leicestershire Crown Prosecution Service would be to split it from the Northamptonshire CPS, so that each operates separately and recruits separately to fill the existing vacancies?

The Attorney-General: Those two counties will benefit as much as any other area from the increased reumuneration that I have just announced. One problem has been that one of those two counties had no county prosecuting solicitors' department before the CPS was introduced, while the other did. My hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General has visited those areas, and I am confident that the problem will be overcome.

Security Services

77. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Attorney-General how many members of the security services have been prosecuted for espionage *(a)* successfully and *(b)* unsuccessfully, in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General: In the past 10 years two members of the security and intelligence services have been prosecuted—Prime in 1982 and Bettany in 1984. Both were convicted.

Mr. Greenway: Is this, or is this not, the unseen tip—the tip of an unseen iceberg—*[Interruption.]* Well, they sometimes turn over and the tip goes under. Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that any person guilty of betraying his country should be vigorously brought to book?

The Solicitor-General: I have no reason to think that it is the tip of an iceberg or that members of the security and intelligence services are anything other than loyal and dedicated public servants. However, my hon. Friend will recall that Bettany and Prime, who were brought to book and prosecuted, received total sentences of 23 and 35 years respectively.

Mr. Winnick: No foreign intelligence service with any sense would ever recruit the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) as a spy. Does the hon. and learned Gentleman agree that it would be helpful if the Attorney-General took seriously the allegations of subversion by some members of the security forces against an elected Government in the 1970s? Is it not essential that the truth be known, whether or not Wright lied?

The Solicitor-General: I have nothing to add to the statement made in the House by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Prosecutions

78. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Attorney-General how many decisions relating to prosecutions he has taken in the last three months.

The Attorney-General: Too many to enumerate accurately.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Government, as a matter of urgency, review the law as set out in the Company Securities (Insider Dealing) Act 1985 following the case of Mr. Brian Fisher, who was brought before the courts but cleared of the charge of illlegally trading in the shares of Thomson T-Line? Does the Attorney-General understand that this is an important area that needs urgent reform? If no action is taken, many of those involved in the criminal offence of insider dealing will go to court and get off. Is he aware of the cases on the desk of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry relating to Matthew Brown shares? Should not action be taken in the courts against those people? We demand a prosecution, because they are all guilty.

The Attorney-General: If the hon. Gentleman is so sure that they are all guilty, one is rather surprised that he troubles with the prosecution. The Government have an unsurpassed record on the introduction of legislation designed to ensure high standards and conformity with proper standards in the matter to which his question refers. I have seen a report of the case to which he referred. I shall ensure that my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Home Secretary consider the matter.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

AIDS

86. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commowealth Affairs what requests for assistance he has received for programmes to combat AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Chris Patten): The World Health Organisation is moblising the external assistance needed for AIDS control programmes in developing countries. Subject to parliamentary approval, we shall contribute £4·5 million to support its work this year. In addition, we have taken part in donor meetings, arranged by the World Health Organisation, in four African countries and have pledged a total of £4·6 million over five years towards their national AIDS programmes.

Mr. Butler: My hon. Friend may be aware that the South African Government have sent about 1,000 migrant workers back to Malawi because they are AIDS positive. Has he received any request for help from Malawi?

Mr. Patten: I have had no official report on the matter that my hon. Friend has mentioned; nor, as far as I know, has the World Health Organisation. We have received no requests for assistance from the Malawi Government.

Mr. Boateng: The Minister will be aware that quite considerable success has been achieved by various public health information campaigns on the issue of AIDS in the sub-Saharan region. The spread of the virus is made infinitely worse by the collapse of the economic infrastructures of many of the most severely affected countries. Does he recognise that, as part of the campaign against AIDS, the time has come to re-evaluate our policy on sub-Saharan debt and to take new initiatives to create in such regions an economic climate that is more likely to enable and enhance, rather than hinder, the combating of AIDS?

Mr. Patten: I take it that, like, for example, the Commonwealth Finance Ministers last year, the hon. Gentleman is endorsing the Chancellor of the Exchequer's debt initiative. Again, last week, the Chancellor made a speech at the spring meetings of the international financial institutions in Washington. We hope that decisions can be taken by the autumn meetings. It is time that we acted, and acted decisively, on African debt.

Kampuchea

88. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent changes he has made in United Kingdom aid to Kampuchean refugees on the Thai-Cambodia border.

Mr. Chris Patten: No recent changes have been made. We continue to provide substantial aid to Cambodians seeking refuge in the border camps, in cash through international relief agencies, and in kind through our embassy in Bangkok. In 1987 such assistance totalled £1·37 million.

Mr. Mullin: Is the Minister aware of a report that was published recently by Tony Jackson, of Oxfam, suggesting that some of our food aid is finding its way into the hands of the Khmer Rouge? In the light of that, does he not think that a new look should be taken into where aid is going? As he knows, every year at the United Nations we vote for the Khmer Rouge, but I am sure he will agree that it is shameful for his Department to provide it with food as well.

Mr. Patten: We do not vote every year in the United Nations in favour of Khmer Rouge. With 116 other countries we vote in favour of the withdrawal of foreign forces from Cambodia and in favour of free elections under United Nations supervision. I am surprised to hear Opposition Members attacking that United Nations resolution in such robust terms. Our aid does not go to the Khmer Rouge, and we have received assurances from the relevant United Nations agencies that that is the case.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does the Minister accept that the Thai Government attach considerable importance to aid being given in cash terms—so that they can pay farmers to grow crops—rather than their being sent food of any sort? Regrettably, if they cannot pay farmers to grow legitimate crops, they will grow poppies.

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the relationship between the support given to farmers in the region and the importance of preventing an increase in the cultivation of poppies. We have one or two programmes which are attempting to eradicate drugs, and they depend very much on giving the right incentives to farmers.

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is a reasonable man—something that distinguishes him from many of his own party. Therefore, knowing what we all know now about the unspeakable horrors of year zero under the Khmer Rouge in Kampuchea, why do the Minister and the Government continue to hide behind this 116-nation resolution and vote in the Credentials Committee of the United Nations to recognise the coalition that includes the perpetrators of the barbarism that occurred so many years ago and as a consequence deny, out of expediency, the valuable aid that the people of that country so desperately need today?

Mr. Patten: I shall not damage the hon. Gentleman's career by paying him a similar compliment in return. I

would point out, once again, that what we are voting for in the United Nations is free elections under United Nations supervision and for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Cambodia. Those are entirely legitimate objectives. At the same time, we provide humanitarian assistance for refugees on the borders of Cambodia, and will continue to do so.

Nepal

89. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he proposes any new aid for Nepal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: During my recent visit to Nepal I announced a new British grant of £20 million for development aid.

Dr. Clark: Does my hon. Friend agree that there are few countries with closer links to Britain than Nepal? Does he also agree that there are few countries more grateful for the aid that Britain gives than Nepal? Is he aware of the need of funds in Nepal for reafforestation? Is he hopeful that some of the welcome £20 million that he has just mentioned will be spent in that direction?

Mr. Patten: I very much agree with what my hon. Friend has said about relations between Britain and Nepal. He is also right to point to the importance of afforestation schemes in that country. When I recently visited Nepal I was pleased to visit the Forestry Institute, the new buildings of which have been erected with assistance from this country. I met the Forestry Minister and discussed the further help that we could provide to that sector in his country. I also visited the first-class agricultural research station at Pakrabhas, which is also doing a good deal of work in that sector.

Mr. Cohen: If the Minister consults his Front-Bench colleagues, he will discover that a constituent of mine was treated in a deplorable manner by the Nepalese authorities, in breach of both Nepalese and international law. Will the Minister make the aid conditional on those authorities improving their human rights record?

Mr. Patten: We have drawn the attention of the Nepal Government to some of the cases raised by Amnesty International.

Mr. Soames: Is my hon. Friend aware of the anxiety about the future of the Gurkha hospital? Will his Department be able to assist that excellent institution?

Mr. Patten: We are discussing with the Nepal Government the conversion of Dharan. I agree with what my hon. Friend said about the value of the hospital at that base, and that is something that we shall have to take into account in the next few years.

Soil Erosion (Assistance)

90. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance Her Majesty's Government are providing for measures to prevent soil erosion in areas bordering the Sahara.

Mr. Chris Patten: Through our contributions to the European development fund we are playing a significant part in supporting measures to combat desertification in countries bordering the Sahara. Projects costing some £123 million have been approved so far under the sixth European development fund; our share of this amounts to about £20 million. In addition, we are providing assistance in the Sudan from our bilateral programme aimed at halting desert encroachment and reducing environmental decline.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. Is he aware that the United Nations environmental programme forecasts the loss of good land in Africa because of desertification? Is he also aware of the estimates from the European Commission of how much of central, east and west Africa will be lost by the same process? Following his helpful reply, does the Minister agree that preventing the loss of agricultural land in Africa should be one of our main priorities for our overseas aid development programme?

Mr. Patten: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's point about the importance of halting desertification. The Sahara is moving an inexorable 4 m per year towards the Nile. That is why we have some good projects in Sudan; for example, the western savannah project, and the northern region irrigation rehabilitation programme, which I saw for myself. That is why we support the work of SOS Sahel, which is one of the best non-governmental organisations working in the area.

Mr. Stanbrook: Is my hon. Friend aware that investment in the provision of deep concrete-lined wells in villages abutting the Sahara would benefit this cause to a far greater extent than similar developments elsewhere?

Mr. Patten: I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of wells in the area. We have several projects to rehabilitate those that already exist and to build new ones.

Persian Gulf (Developments)

3.30 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest developments in the Gulf.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Mellor): On Thursday 14 April the US frigate, Samuel B. Roberts, struck a mine in international waters in the Gulf, resulting in 10 injuries. The Americans have clear evidence of fresh Iranian mine laying, a cowardly act which we utterly condemn.

In the early hours of today US naval forces bombarded the Iranian operated Sassan and Nasr oil platforms in the Sassan oilfield. We support the American action as a measured and proportionate response to the Iranian mine laying.

Later on this morning Iranian gunboats and perhaps helicopters attacked the American staffed Scan bay oil platform off Abu Musa island. The Hong Kong flagged storage vessel, York Marine, was set on fire in the attack and its Indian crew have abandoned ship. A US flagged service tug, the Willie Tide, was also attacked. We deplore this irresponsible and irrational action by the Iranians with no advance warning. There may well be casualties, but we have no further details at present.

I should add that American warships have also sunk an Iranian fast patrol boat, the Joshan, north of Sassan, in an exchange apparently began by the Joshan. Latest reports indicate that the Iranian frigate, Sahand, has been involved in an exchange of fire with US naval forces. The Sahand has been totally disabled and is on fire.

Mr. Kaufman: Is it not a fact that nine months have elapsed since the passage of Security Council resolution 598 calling for a ceasefire between Iran and Iraq, and that due to the obstinacy and procrastination of Iran no progress has been made in implementing that resolution, despite the Foreign Secretary's assurance then that non-compliance would trigger discussion of possible enforcement measures?

Does the Minister recall the warning that I gave on 21 July 1987, and again on 21 October, that escalation through unilateral United States naval action and consequent tit-for-tat warlike exchanges could lead to uncontrollable escalation, with grave consequences for peace? Has not the ratchet of that escalation been turned most dangerously today?

Her Majesty's Opposition totally condemn the fresh Iranian mine laying which has led to the latest outbreak in the Gulf, as well as the most recent Iranian aggression, including the outrageous attack on the York Marine. However, is not the attack on the York Marine a direct consequence of the United State's attack on Iranian oil installations? How can that United States attack be reconciled with resolution 598, which calls upon all other states to exercise the utmost restraint and refrain from any act that might lead to a further escalation and widening of the conflict?

Will the Minister tell the House how the Armilla patrol and Britain's minesweepers will be affected? When I met them in the Gulf recently, British naval ratings, while ready and eager to do their job for this country, expressed concern at being placed at risk by America's undisclosed rules of engagement. The self-imposed role of policing international sea lanes is not the prerogative of the United States or any other maritime nation. Is it not now time that all naval fleets in the Gulf were placed under United Nations command so that Iran and Iraq should be in no doubt that an attack on vessels or installations of any non-combatant nation is an attack on the entire world community? Above all should not the five permanent members now go immediately to the Security Council to demand a mandatory arms embargo on either combatant still refusing to agree to a ceasefire? Nine months have been wasted. We should not waste a single day more.

Mr. Mellor: As the right hon. Gentleman well knows, we have been taking the lead in trying to seek follow-up action at the United Nations and we have been instrumental in providing the drafting of a follow-up resolution for an arms embargo. I am grateful for his support for that policy. It is not through any act or default on our part that a follow-up resolution has not been agreed.

The right hon. Gentleman should be clear about one point. It is bad enough that this war continues between Iran and Iraq and obviously, we, like other members of the international community, want to see it brought to an end, but the persistent attempts by the Iranians to spread the hostilities across the Gulf to attack international shipping that is simply using the right of passage to carry on international trade and to attack installations that belong to countries that are not participating in this war is wholly unacceptable. The only reason why we have not seen more of this Iranian action is the presence of United States, British and other naval forces in the Gulf. Our Armilla patrol will continue to do its duty.

The unacceptable action in the recent incident was clearly the decision of the Iranians to start laying mines again—a cowardly act—the consequence of which was the severe damage done to the United States warship in international waters. In those circumstances, the United States was fully entitled to the right of self-defence, under article 51 of the United Nations charter, to take measured and proportionate action against Iranian oil platforms which, the United States says, are used to facilitate attacks on international shipping. I do not believe that we would be any nearer preventing the spread of hostilities in the Gulf if the United States refused to take action on the provocation offered by this fresh mine-laying incident.

It is crucial for us all to be realistic about this matter. What is entirely unrealistic is the requirement for a UN naval force. There can be no basis for thinking that a UN naval force is a practical proposition at this time. The nearer one gets to New York and the headquarters of the UN, the nearer one gets to a recognition that it is merely a piece of escapism to think that a UN naval force is a credible option in today's circumstances.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Is not the little exercise of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) in America-bashing inappropriate and unconstructive at present? Following the difficulties into which resolution 598 got the United Nations, following in turn the actions by Iraq, which somewhat prejudiced its position, is not the need now for moves to be made on the basis of the widest possible international support to get an

effective and tough arms embargo against the Iranian fanatics? Is not that the next move that should be made, and will my hon. and learned Friend comment on it?

Mr. Mellor: I agree with my right hon. Friend that there has been fault on both sides in this war. It is absolutely clear that the Iraqis would have accepted resolution 598 and that the Iranians have persistently refused to do so. The international community must address that matter.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Is the Minister aware that many people believe that our greatly increased trade with Iran enables it in part to provide the sinews of the war that were behind this incident, and that we should examine our position? The Minister did not make it clear in answer to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) whether he fears that escalation will ensue from action in relation to oil platforms. He did not say whether there were any casualties on the York Marine or whether any holders of British passports were involved. Will he tell us that now?

Mr. Mellor: The best information that I can give to the House is that contained in my original answer: there may have been casualties, but we have no details. As far as we know, the crew of the York Marine are Indian, but that does not lessen the seriousness with which we regard the incident.

As for escalation, I repeat the point that I made earlier. The act that led to escalation was the Iranians' cynical and cowardly mining of international waters—a haphazard business that could have resulted in the loss of any ship travelling in the vicinity. Unless action is taken to ensure that the Iranians are aware that such a policy cannot flourish, we shall see more such incidents. We say that the United States was entitled to make a measured and appropriate response, pursuant to the right of self-defence for all sovereign states under article 51 of the United Nations charter, and that is what the United States did.

As for trade, in recent years our exports to Iran have fallen dramatically, to about £240 million. There is no trade with Iran in armaments or any equipment and supplies that could extend the war. That has been our position for a long time.

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that Iran must be contained? Does he further agree that, once committed in the Gulf, the United States had to react and that the House should support that reaction? Does he accept that the United Kingdom is involved in matters in which it exercises insufficient overall control? In those circumstances, and accepting the magnificent role of the Royal Navy in the Gulf in recent years, will he do his utmost to de-escalate the position?

Mr. Mellor: The presence of the Armilla patrol is intended as a de-escalatory move. It is intended to protect the free passage of British and British dependency flag shipping, to allow it to carry on what mariners have done for generations and to allow proper trade with countries in the Gulf. We shall continue to do that, and we believe that that is the best contribution that we can make to ensuring that international lawlessness does not prevail in the Gulf.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): Is it not entirely contrary to international law, and entirely wrong, for the Iranians to attack neutral shipping in a neutral port in the Gulf? Was that ship conducted through the Straits of Hormuz by the Armilla patrol, and will it enjoy that protection on the way back? What action will the Minister take with Iran to register our strong objection and to protest at what has been done?

Mr. Mellor: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his question. The York Marine was not known to the Armilla patrol. As far as we know, it is a Hong Kong-registered vessel that is leased by the Bute Oil Company, which operates the oilfield that was attacked by the Iranians this morning. The ship was being used as a storage vessel when it was attacked.

I agree with what the right hon. Gentleman said about Iranian attacks on neutral shipping. The attack on Abu Musa island, whose sovereignty is disputed between Iran and the United Arab Emirates, marks an escalation in the conflict because it is a further attack on facilities operated by countries that are not engaged in the hostilities.

As for British action, we wish to take a cool look at the position. We do not have all the facts, and I should not be pressed further on that point now.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): Is my hon. and learned Friend aware that there will be widespread support for the clarity and supportive nature of his statement this afternoon? Does he agree that deliberate aggression in international waters invites retaliation? Would it not be unacceptable to have as a response to aggression all international flags of free countries flying under the flag of the United Nations? Countries must be able to exercise their right of self-defence, as the Americans have done, and we should support them fully.

Mr. Mellor: I agree with my hon. Friend. In the past 12 months, Western navies have been in the Gulf and their presence has acted to confine the Iranian willingness to get involved in acts of international hooliganism and aggression. It is part of that policy of containment that a nation should be free to exercise its right of self defence when provocation occurs of the nature that the Iranians have offered. If the Iranians were to think that no such self-defensive action were to follow, it would give them carte blanche to become involved in further actions, such as the mine laying.

Mr. David Young (Bolton, South-East): Both sides of the House accept that there was provocation, but will the Minister tell us whether there was any consultation under the much-flaunted special relationship between the United States and Britain regarding the retaliatory action that was taken? That action must inevitably involve, in some form of escalation, the lives of British seamen. Has the Minister any information about the supply, or promise, of speedboats to Iran by neutral countries such as Sweden? If so, what representations are being made by the Government?

Mr. Mellor: It is a matter for individual judgment, but I believe that the greatest threat to the lives of British seamen is from the laying of mines in international waters by the Iranians. Failure to take action to deal with that puts British seamen at a greater risk than they are as a result of the alternative course that has been adopted.

With regard to what the United States did this morning, we were notified a few hours before, but we were not consulted as such. As to the sale of arms to Iran and Iraq, until there is an arms embargo resolution of the United

[Mr. Mellor]

Nations, it is a matter for each country to determine its rules. We, of course, have our own have very clear rules about such sales.

Mr. Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): I was involved in the establishment, maintenance and administration of a UN peacekeeping force. Is my hon. and learned Friend aware that it is difficult enough to establish an effective land force—as we have discovered in Lebanon, Cyprus an elsewhere—and that the UN is totally incapable of having a UN naval force? Although the UN may have a role in the area, a UN naval force is not the answer.

Mr. Mellor: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said that it had taken nearly six months to achieve a follow-up resolution on paper imposing an arms embargo. How long does anyone believe that it would take to establish a UN naval force? We are faced with a problem not next year or in the next decade, but now.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): Opposition Members are not troubled by the fact that there has been a response against Iranian aggression—we are in favour of a tough response against such aggression; what troubles us, and troubles the Royal Navy personnel with whom I have spoken in the Gulf, is the unilateral nature of such American action. I have heard the Minister say three times in the House that a UN-commanded naval force in the Gulf is impractical. I have never heard him explain exactly how and why that is so. Will he give the House the benefit of such an explanation now?

Mr. Mellor: It is interesting that the one country that has been anxious to see a UN naval force, the Soviet Union, avoided giving details for some months about exactly what that force would involve. When the Soviet Union came up with those details, it appeared that it envisaged a force accompanying vessels, not just to the side of the Gulf not involved in the conflict, but into Iranian ports. The idea of a UN naval force interposing itself between two combatants who are determined to attack shipping serving each other's ports is, I believe, a sign of the hopeless impracticability of the scheme. Such sentiment as there was in favour of a UN naval force before the Soviet Union came up with its plan almost totally melted away once the full details of that plan were given.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): Did my hon. and learned Friend have time to consult the Gulf Co-operation Council, and if so, what were its views about the incident?

Mr. Mellor: We have not had time to receive any such opinion. We will want to consult our friends in the Gulf about the matter, as it is in protection of their right to trade with us and with other countries freely that we are playing our role.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that this is a private notice question—an extension of Question Time. We have a heavy day ahead of us.

Shipbuilding

3.49 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister of Trade and Industry (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): British Shipbuilders has been approached about the disposal of a number of its facilities, notably at Govan on the Clyde and Appledore in Devon. Those approaches are being considered in line with our policy of returning as much of the corporation as possible to the private sector.

As regards Govan, BS has today received a letter of intent to purchase the yard from Kvaerner Industries, a Norwegian company at the forefront of international gas ship technology, which operates an important fleet of its own. Kvaerner Industries is a respected company with expertise in gas-carrying ships which it would propose to build in future on the Clyde. I regard this as a very welcome proposal. I hope that the negotiations succeed.

Should it acquire Govan, Kvaerner intends to transfer its gas ship technology to the United Kingdom via the yard by giving project support and assistance for gas ships built at Govan. Thereafter, Kvaerner plans to develop Govan into its centre for gas ship technology in support of worldwide activities in this sphere.

Kvaerner would want to attach certain conditions to an agreement in Govan. The company says that some restructuring would be inevitable to ensure that the yard is fully competitive in the international market place. As an important part of the agreement, Kvaerner would undertake to place an order for two medium-sized LPG carriers to be built at Govan for delivery in 1990 and 1991.

I also have to tell the House that the chairman of British Shipbuilders has told me about contractual difficulties with the ferry programme at North East Shipbuilders at Sunderland. Naturally, I hope these difficulties can be overcome and I am keeping closely in touch with developments. I shall keep the House closely informed and make a further statement if necessary in due course.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): Is the Minister aware that his statement not only places major question marks over the future of the Govan yard, but poses even more worrying questions about the viability of what will be left of British Shipbuilders? With regard to Govan, is this not a further example of the Government's readiness to sell off to foreign interests an investment in a strategic British industry which the Government themselves are not prepared to sustain? If Govan is an attractive prospect to a Norwegian company, why can it not be supported in the national interest by the British Government?

If the Norwegians have work to place with Govan, which is in itself very welcome, why must that be accompanied by giving away the yard? What assurances can the Minister give the work force at Govan and the House about jobs and pension rights? What write-offs of taxpayers' money will be made? What price will the taxpayer receive for the substantial investment that has been made?

Is this death by one thousand cuts not the inevitable consequence of the policy of dismembering British shipbuilding, upon which the Government embarked four years ago? What is the future of those yards in the north-east and the south-west? Will the Minister now amplify his cryptic remarks about Appledore and North East Shipbuilders? Can he categorically assure the House

that his statement is not the forerunner of a decision, reported in many quarters, to cut British Shipbuilders' lifeline by withdrawing Government support later this year?

Would it not be ironic—though all too typical—if the Government destroyed our merchant shipbuilding industry just at the time when that industry has become technologically advanced and is therefore well placed to take advantage of the increased demand for world shipping? Is the Minister aware that he will not be forgiven if he allows a historic and vital British industry to expire, with all the damage that that will do to jobs, to the regions and to the national strategic interest? I invite the Minister to tell the House that his statement will not be, and is not intended to be, the death knell of British shipbuilding.

Mr. Clarke: What I have announced today is very good news for a part of British shipbuilding on the Clyde, at Govan. The Norwegian company involved is an operator of gas-carrying ships. It has been constructing them, putting its technology under licence, at various yards throughout the world. The company wishes to acquire a yard of its own where that technology can be developed. It has given up shipbuilding in Norway because it is too expensive. It believes that Govan can be turned into such a yard and that it can be the base for the company's activities. It has work to place. That is good news for Govan, where they are building two Chinese container ships which are likely to be completed in the fairly near future.

I cannot give the House details of the basis on which we might dispose of the yard. What I have announced today is that British Shipbuilders has received a letter of intent and that negotiations are now to take place. A purchase of the yard would involve taking over employees. They would be transferred to the new company with their accrued pension benefits intact.

As for Appledore, we have a number of expressions of interest, but they are all commercially confidential at the moment. It would be most unwise of me to run the risk of prejudicing discussions about the future of Appledore by giving further details to the House now.

At North East Shipbuilders, as people in that part of the world know, there are certain contractual difficulties at the moment between British Shipbuilders and the purchaser of the ferries built there. There are six very good ferries in the water in the Wear, and British Shipbuilders is negotiating with its customer how to resolve the contractual difficulties. I hope that those discussions are successful. I am keeping steadily in touch and I shall keep the House informed if I have anything to report.

Mr. Bruce Millan (Glasgow, Govan): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that nobody is more anxious than I am to get additional work placed at the Govan yard? I would warmly welcome orders for ships from Norway or anywhere else. What we object to is the disposal, or, more accurately, the give-away, of the yard. The Minister has produced absolutely no justification for that. Why can there not be an ordinary commercial contract? There might even be a joint venture between the Norwegian company and British Shipbuilders. Why is the yard being disposed of, bearing in mind the long-term implications, to say nothing of those for the rest of British shipbuilders?

What we want for Govan are long-term assurances for the future, not short-term relief. We are talking of an international company which operates abroad. It is closing its own yard in Norway, despite vehement protests from the trade unions involved. There are to be 600 job losses. We are apprehensive about the fact that the same could happen to Govan in a comparatively short time.

Mr. Clarke: Kvaerner prefers to buy the yard. We cannot force it to place orders in a yard on any terms other than those in which it is interested. This is an attractive proposition. At the moment Kvaerner places orders for ships in various yards around the world, using its own technology under licence. It wants to acquire a yard where it can develop that technology and use it as the basis for future developments. That is extremely good news.

While the Govan yard is owned by British Shipbuilders, it is completing work on two Chinese container ships. The right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) knows that that work will be completed in the reasonably near future. Lay-offs will begin this year if no other work is forthcoming and, unless other orders are found, the yard will have to close by next year. What I have described today is the most encouraging development that we have seen in regard to Govan for a long time. I hope that the negotiations succeed and that everybody who is interested, as the right hon. Gentleman says he is—I am sure that he is—in the long-term future of the yard will welcome the development, trust that the negotiations will succeed and encourage people to do everything possible to bring them to a successful conclusion.

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): May I press my right hon. and learned Friend, not for any commercially confidential information, but to bear in mind when he mentions the Appledore shipyard en passant the fact that it is one of the smaller but more efficient and highly productive yards and is a vital cog in the north Devon and Torridge economy? When he speaks of the yard, will he bear in mind, despite the yard's relative smallness, its great importance to north Devon and north Cornwall?

Mr. Clarke: I realise the importance of the yard to the economy of Devon, as it is the major engineering employer in the area. It has had some success in attracting orders for dredgers, which are a speciality of the yard. It is encouraging—I hope my hon. Friend agrees—that a number of people have expressed an interest in acquiring the yard and running it as a going business. We will enter such a deal only if we are convinced that it is in the best interests of the yard and of the economy of the surrounding area.

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): Will the Minister confirm that the contractual difficulties at NESL to which he referred are not in any way the responsibility of either the management or the work force at NESL but lie with the purchaser, and that the programme for the delivery of those ships is on time?

Does the Minister also accept that his statement today, with the background of press rumours that have been continuing for some days, strikes great fear into the hearts of everyone who is committed to the future of British merchant shipbuilding? The previous chairman, Mr. Graham Day, who butchered the industry enough, always

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said that one could not sink below the present level of facilities and that any further reduction in capacity would make the industry unviable.

The Minister has given no assurance about the future of NESL and the very uncertainty reflected in this statement, with the further division of the industry and what is happening at Govan, makes it virtually impossible at present for NESL or any of the other subsidiaries to obtain the few orders that are around in the world at present. I believe that the Minister knows that. He should underwrite the future of the industry now. He should stop the rumours and the nonsense. He should keep British Shipbuilders together and enable it to obtain the significant orders that are available at present, rather than sabotage them, as the statement does.

Mr. Clarke: I regret the uncertainty that surrounds the future of the industry, and I understand the demoralising effect of that uncertainty. For that reason, when I was in Sunderland last Friday, I had a meeting with the hon. Gentleman and the trade union——

Mr. Clay: The Minister said nothing about it then.

Mr. Clarke: It was probably a good thing that I did not enter into more detail, because had I done so I would have fed the uncertainty and might have run the risk of prejudicing the negotiations with Kvaerner, about which I could not tell the hon. Gentleman. They have been leaked to the press and have caused some excitement in Scotland. I hope that I have been able to calm fears in Scotland, because it is good news for Scotland.

Meanwhile, it is not helpful for me to enter into the merits of any dispute that may develop between British Shipbuilders and the purchaser of the Danish ferries. I am keeping in touch with the discussions between the chairman of British Shipbuilders and his colleagues and the customer and, as I have said, I hope that those discussions will come to a satisfactory conclusion. If they do not, we may face a serious situation, because the only orders in Sunderland at present are for the Danish ferries. However, if a serious situation arises, we shall face it then and certainly do whatever we can to ensure that the well-being of Sunderland is sustained.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Is not the truth of the matter that there is a vast tonnage of very new general merchandise carriers laid up and that there is a vast number of shipyards throughout the world in competition for the available demand? Should we not therefore welcome the opportunity to bring the focus of specialist skills for specialised markets to shipyards of our own that have no other prospects?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. As he has shrewdly said, this is a buyers' market, where there is a huge excess of would-be builders of ships compared with would-be purchasers. That is why it is so foolish for Scottish Members to say, "We prefer the industry to remain nationalised, come what may," and wait for the purchasers to come along. That is no guarantee that any purchasers will come along.

A good Norwegian company wants to make Clydeside the basis for its particular strength in the market place in gas technology. That should be welcomed by all Scottish Members.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Is the Minister aware that in the past few weeks there have been repeated reports that the Government plan to pull the plug on what remains of the entire British shipbuilding industry, by cutting all further Government aid? Will he say now whether there is any truth in that, and will he recognise that the possible deal with Govan spells ruin for thousands of people in Sunderland?

Mr. Clarke: It makes no sense for one Member of Parliament for Sunderland to complain about the rumours and uncertainty, and for the other Member for Parliament for Sunderland to say, "I have just heard another rumour. Would the Minister like to comment on it?"

As I said to the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) last Friday, on the last occasion that I met him, the Government have taken no new decisions on British shipbuilding since we had a protracted debate on the subject in the House last summer. As hon. Members will gather, this is a fast-moving scene and I am keeping in close touch with events in all the yards. We have to keep the future of the yards under review because the Government have already lost £1·5 billion in those yards over the last nine years. We are putting substantial amounts of money into the yard, but the situation is so serious that one must keep in close touch with it and deal properly with events as they come up, sometimes week by week, as is now the case in Govan.

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that this will be seen as good news in Scotland, with a future assured for Govan? However, does he also accept that there will be great concern in the north-east about the future of the industry there? Will he give an assurance that the Government remain committed to intervention fund assistance for all shipbuilders in this country, and, in particular, will seek every possible order for Sunderland shipbuilders, bearing in mind the difficulties in respect of the Danish ferries?

Mr. Clarke: Fortunately, the yard closest to my hon. Friend's constituency, Swan Hunter, is at present in a good state, has an order book and is doing well in its newly privatised condition.

As I have said, the Government have given substantial support for orders throughout the past eight or nine years and British Shipbuilders has also incurred substantial losses on top of that intervention fund support. If orders come alone, the Government have to consider what is proposed and see what the costs are and whether they are justified to continue maintaining the yard for that particular order. However, at present, I know of no orders in prospect for Sunderland after the completion of the Danish ferry contract.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): Why is the Minister allowing British Shipbuilders to take that course, when he knows that the privatisation of Scott Lithgow was really a rip-off? I still do not understand why the Norwegians' buying Govan shipyard will make all the difference. I do not understand why Govan shipyard should not be able to build those gas-carrying ships itself.

I should also like to know what consultations the Minister has had with the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Scottish Office on the question of selling off what is known as the jewel in the crown of British shipbuilding. Govan shipyard?

Mr. Clarke: I am not quite sure on what basis the hon. Lady says that the sale of Scott Lithgow was a rip-off. I do not know what she believes British Shipbuilders would be building in the yard if it still owned it. As she knows, that yard has unfortunately not been able to maintain its order book for the oil rig business that it thought it was going into.

I have already tried to explain the basis upon which the Norwegian company is approaching Govan. It is not looking just to place more orders under licence in the cheapest yard in the world. There is no guarantee that Govan would be the cheapest place to go to, if that was the basis upon which the company was operating. This Norwegian company is looking for a base where it can continue to develop its considerable technological skills in this respect. If it acquires a suitable base at Govan, it will immediately start building two ships there, and will also no doubt look to the long-term future there as it develops its technology.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): Has my right hon. and learned Friend had an opportunity to see the comment by the convenor of the shop stewards at Govan, who said that, at the end of the day, they want work in Govan? Is that not much more sensible than some of the comments that we have heard from Opposition Members? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that his announcement is a tribute to Govan, not a threat to it? Govan needs orders, and additional technology would be a great help for its long-term future. Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that it is important that the work force is given the maximum amount of detailed information at the earliest possible opportunity?

Mr. Clarke: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. We have had sufficient recent experience of the trade union and labour movement driving away prospective jobs in Scotland because of its political views. Many people who work in Govan shipyard, who were worried last week because they could not see where any more work was to come from when the container ships were completed, will now be considerably relieved to hear that a good Norwegian company is seriously interested in maintaining shipbuilding there with these specialised vessels. I am sure that the company will want to give the maximum amount of information to the work force. It is obviously important for the company, if an agreement is reached, to have a satisfactory understanding with the work force and to ensure that it motivates the work force in the right way, so as to achieve success in the future.

Dr. Norman A. Goodman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I am sure that when the Prime Minister visited my constituency she was told of the importance to it of marine engineering and shipbuilding. The Minister referred to Appledore. I remind him that the correct title of that firm is Appledore Ferguson. One yard is in Devon and the other is in Port Glasgow in my constituency. It employs 400 people. What assurance can the Minister give on the continuation of that yard? On the matter of Govan, the two engines for the two Chinese orders are being built at Clark Kincaid in Greenock, and one of the engines was test-run this morning. What assurance can he give the work force at Ferguson in Port Glasgow and Clark Kincaid in East Hamilton street, Greenock?

Mr. Clarke: Those shipbuilding facilities have work now and we are always looking to their future, as is British Shipbuilders. For the reasons put succinctly by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton, (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop), it is always difficult to guarantee any sort of future for those facilities, and we shall have to continue to look for future work prospects and future expressions of interest in acquiring those companies. In the case of Clark Kincaid, it is possible that a restatement such as I have made today of the Government's interest in receiving worthwhile approaches for the purchase of the facilities will lead to renewed expressions of interest. There is every prospect that that company could have an assured future.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept, that if he is able to press ahead with the sale of NESL to an overseas buyer who can guarantee orders at Govan, that may well be the best thing that could happen in the north-east? It would be like Nissan, also in the north-east. In that way we could do away with the bad industrial relations in the Sunderland area which have been detrimental to obtaining orders for the area. Instead of losing £1 million a week, we might be able to use that £1 million in the National Health Service.

Mr. Clarke: Neither the chairman of British Shipbuilders nor I have had an approach from anybody interested in buying North East Shipbuilders. I should make it clear that British Shipbuilders and the Government would welcome any serious approach from interested parties. As my hon. Friend is probably aware, some Japanese companies with an interest in technological co-operation recently visited the yard. We shall have to see where that goes. Otherwise, I agree that we have to look to the future in the economy of the north-east. One has to place the concerns being expressed in Sunderland against the fact that Nissan is expanding its facilities rapidly in Washington new town which is in the same borough. It is good to see how successful a company can be in that part of the world, anticipating as it is a huge increase in employment in Washington new town in the early 1990s.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): The remarks of the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) will be repudiated in the north-east of England, and the patronising statements from the Minister will find no welcome in that area. The statement tells us nothing about the future for the headquarters of British Shipbuilders, which is in my constituency, except that a nationalised industry will be closed by the Government. I notice that the Minister did not make any statement about future intentions regarding intervention funding. Why does he not come clean with the House and say that today's statement is the death knell of the nationalised shipbuilding industry in this country?

Mr. Clarke: I spent quite a proportion of last week in the north-east, in Newcastle, as well as in Stockton, Sunderland and Middlesbrough. It is obvious to visitors and the majority of inhabitants in the north-east that the economy is reviving rapidly. There is a huge increase in manufacturing investment. Indeed, the principal complaint that I faced as I went around the north-east was that there is now a shortage of modern, larger factory space to accommodate all those who wish to invest in the region. That shows how rapidly the economy is reviving and expanding. I cannot understand why Labour Members

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from the north-east insist on leaping in to talk about the death and destruction of the local economy, thereby undermining the efforts of such bodies as the Northern Development Company, which is beginning to talk about and advertise the substantial successes that the region is now achieving.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is a considerable compliment to the country, and a tribute to the industrial climate that exists, that Kvaerner Industries, which is a highly sophisticated group, has decided to get out of shipbuilding in its own native land of Norway and decided to develop that activity in, of all places, the United Kingdom? Surely that is a much greater compliment than a mere order for ships could possibly be. Is it not about time that the Opposition Front Bench woke up to what is going on in this country?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend that most Scotsmen should react by being proud, and to a certain extent relieved, that an important company such as Kvaerner is prepared to commit itself and its future to a shipbuilding facility on the Clyde. A large proportion of the Labour party is so wedded to nationalisation that it would rather see the yard nationalised but dead, than privatised with a future.

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): Will the Minister take the opportunity at the earliest possible moment to say to his European colleagues that he is not prepared to see British merchant shipbuilding capacity reduced any further, particularly since we have already reduced capacity more than virtually every other EEC country?

Mr. Clarke: I do not think that the European Community has much to do with future capacity in this country, except that we are committed by the sixth directive, which is an attempt to limit the amazing level of state aid that all European countries, including ourselves, have been providing for shipbuilding in recent years. It is a company from western Europe, admittedly not from the Community, but a Norwegian company, that is stepping in and proposing to develop the yard and give it a future. Therefore, I do not think that there is much room for anti-European sentiment on this occasion.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): Is my right hon. and learned Friend not to be congratulated by Scottish and English taxpayers on facilitating this approach from a Scandinavian white knight? Which does he think will bring the greatest relief in Govan today: the fact that such an attractive purchaser has appeared from the private sector, or that Mr. Ron Todd will not be able to veto it?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend does us a service by reminding us of the taxpayers' interest. On the occasion on which we debated British Shipbuilders in the House, I announced an increase in its external financing limit which amounted to £30,000 per head of those employed in the industry. That was the increase alone. The fact that we now have the prospect of an important yard going into private hands with a company that sees it as having a good commercial future is good news. Some Scotsmen will hear echoes of the views of Ron Todd and his reaction to foreign investment in Dundee on terms that he found unacceptable in the reactions from some Opposition Members today about a Norwegian company coming along to buy Govan and build its ships there.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Will the House and the Minister accept that the shipyard workers in Scotland are neither simplistic nor naive enough to believe that if there is a future for that yard it cannot just as easily be secured inside British Shipbuilders itself? That is what caused the fury in the yard. The hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) sells the convenor of Govan short by suggesting that that is all that he said. The shipyard workers in Scotland want to see a future for British shipbuilding. They see that that could be achieved just as easily by the Government taking a greater interest in shipbuilding and perhaps forming a joint venture with the company, rather than by simply selling off their birthright.

Mr. Clarke: I do not believe that shipyard workers in Glasgow will take that view. It sounds as if the hon. Gentleman is encouraging them to turn away the prospect and say, "No, we do not want to have anything to do with Norwegians unless they just place orders." As I have explained, the company will not do that. It wants to buy the yard to have a base from which to develop its own technology. The hon. Gentleman is saying that the shipbuilding workers would prefer to carry on as they are, finishing work on the only two ships that they have to build—the container ships for China—and wait to take their chance on what the world market might offer in the way of more orders in the future. That would be a reckless gamble for them to take. The hon. Gentleman knows that lay-offs will start later this year once the work on cutting the steel for the ships for China is concluded. To adopt the approach suggested by the hon. Gentleman would be to talk Govan into unemployment rather than into the future than Kvaerner appears likely to offer.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I am delighted to remind my right hon. and learned Friend that we have a full order book in the yard in Bideford and continuing orders on the horizon because of the speciality that the yard has developed in building small dredgers. With regard to my right hon. and learned Friend's statement, which I heartily welcome, may I assume that the Opposition would forbid outward investment from us into non-European countries and, in particular, into Norway?

Mr. Clarke: I rather think that they would forbid such investment, but that is not a matter for me. On past form, I think that they would be wholly opposed to us moving too much investment abroad. I agree with my hon. Friend that at present the Appledore yard has a full order book. It plays a specialist role in the industry, as it builds a different type of ship from those built by the remainder of British Shipbuilders. The Government's policy is to welcome any interest in acquiring one of these yards by someone who is interested in offering it a secure commercial future. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be glad to hear that we have had not one but several expressions of interest in the acquisition of that yard.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Will the Minister acknowledge that one of the matters that bemuses those who have some knowledge of shipbuilding is that 18 years ago Mr. Graham Day pulled out of LPG technology when he was chairman of Cammell Laird? The

technology proposed for Govan is not new. How can we guarantee the enterprising economy about which the Secretary of State for Scotland spoke when a Norwegian company is giving up shipbuilding in Norway and moving to Govan, ostensibly to suit its own interests, and when no British consortium is capable of developing long-established technology and building ships that the world desires at the Govan yard under public or private ownership?

Mr. Clarke: LPG technology has moved on quite a lot in the past 10 years. I know that the Scottish Labour party does not want to acknowledge that anything has moved on in the past 10 years, certainly in industry. We are talking about one of the industry's most successful companies wanting to make the Clyde its construction base. The hon. Gentleman might prefer to carry on with nationalised shipyards, to return to LPG technology and start competing again, but I know what option I would prefer if my future lay in the yard.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the only long-term assurance that the yard at Govan and yards elsewhere can be given is for them to produce ships that the market wants at prices that it is prepared to pay? Does he agree that British Shipbuilders has singularly failed in that objective and that this announcement is the only hope for the yard at Govan? Will he remind the House of the money that has been spent propping up British Shipbuilders since nationalisation, and does he agree with many of us who consider that that money has not been well spent?

Mr. Clarke: The total lost since British Shipbuilders was nationalised runs to well over £2 billion, but I shall give the exact figure to my hon. Friend later. Since the Government took office, £1·6 billion has followed the money that was previously lost. Everybody realises that there is no long-term future in doing that. When I visited Sunderland, trade unionists accepted that they were not entitled to timeless subsidies or to have endless losses supported. It is a welcome new phase for Govan to be faced with the prospect of a privately owned Norwegian company, which is very successful in its market, saying that it can make a going business of the yard by building the right product in the right way at a price that the market can accommodate.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall call the five hon. Members who have been rising to ask questions, but I ask them to be very brief.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster offer the House an insight into what "some restructuring" means in the context of his statement about Govan? Will he say what level of foreign ownership he considers to be beneficial to the wider Scottish economy? Furthermore, has he bothered to ask Kvaerner what "some restructuring" will mean for Govan?

Mr. Clarke: The answers to those questions will emerge at a later stage if the negotiations are successful. *[Interruption.]* I am quoting Kvaerner when I say that some restructuring will be inevitable, and I think that that will probably lead to some restructuring of the work force. However, it is far too soon to speculate on what form that restructuring might take. As I said earlier, there will be a dramatic reduction in the work force once the Chinese ships order is completed, unless something comes along or these negotiations are successful.

I trust that the understandable concerns of the work force and others will be answered when discussions take place between the work force and the company contemplating purchase and as negotiations, which I hope will be successful, move to a conclusion. I cannot understand why the Scottish National party should think that an optimum level can be determined for foreign ownership in Scottish industry. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will be cheered by the fact that it will not involve English ownership.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's statement, but will he assure the House that British companies will be given an opportunity to bid for the whole of the industry or any individual yard?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to make it clear that we are preparing to entertain other reasonable approaches for Govan or the other yeards. We have not entered into an exclusive negotiation with Kvaerner.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Given my constituency interest in firms at the North British Steel Foundry, have the Norwegians given any undertakings about whether they will place orders with industry located in the north of England or Scotland?

Mr. Clarke: So far as I am aware they have not, but the nearby foundries are best placed to provide the necessary equipment and steel to the Govan shipyard if it is to have a secure future under Kvaerner. I expect that the hon. Gentleman will raise that question with the company if the negotiations are successful. I suggest to Scottish Members that it is hopeless, when someone is contemplating investing in or securing jobs in Scotland, to confront them with a list of conditions before they have the honour of providing new jobs or keeping jobs in Scotland. We should be welcoming jobs and overseas interests, not behaving in such a manner as to turn them away.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): I welcome anything that saves jobs but, speaking as one of those Scottish Members who occasionally find the profundity of the Chancellor's Anglican thoughts beyond my meagre intellectual grasp, perhaps I can ask him to answer one simple question. If, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman said, the company must move from Norway to Scotland because production costs in Norway are too expensive, why are we thinking of giving the yard away to it? Are production costs in Scotland far too cheap for our tastes?

Mr. Clarke: I think that the company stopped building ships in Norway about two years ago—*[Interruption.]*—because it was too expensive—another fundamental truth on which the Labour party would do well to reflect. Since then the company has been contemplating buying ships abroad and using its own technology under licence. It is now contemplating acquiring a yard so that it does not have to licence its technology and so that it can develop its technology at a particular base. It has decided to consider seriously the possibility of making Clydeside that base. As I have tried to assure hon. Members for quite long enough,

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that is good news for Clydeside and I trust that that will be appreciated when the negotiations come to the successful conclusion for which we are hoping.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The Minister keeps talking about good news in the same breath as restructuring. Is not the truth of that euphemism and this statement that restructuring means putting people on the dole? Why should Scottish shipyard workers, or any other shipyard workers, trust this Norwegian company when it has just sacked 700 of its workers? Does that not suggest that the future, beneath all the Minister's PR talk, is very bleak for all the shipyard workers who will be affected by this statement?

Mr. Clarke: Scottish shipyard workers know only too well that they have a job building ships only when there is an order for ships and when someone who has placed an order is prepared to pay for it and guarantee a continuing future for the yard. There is no way in which I could guarantee continuing employment at Govan, within a nationalised British shipbuilding industry, beyond the two Chinese ferries. That is the very serious possibility that we shall face if these negotiations fall through.

Govan Shipyard

4.28 pm

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the developments at Govan shipyard and the future of British Shipbuilders."

The Government's statement shows that the Government, having failed for years to develop policies to sustain and support British merchant shipbuilding, are washing their hands of the results, as though it were some God-given act and nothing to do with them. The House should urgently debate certain policies. It is absurd to say that there is no work available, other than what the Norwegians offer to Govan, when the House has recently debated the need for major adaptations to roll-on/roll-off ferries for safety purposes, as called for by the Royal Institution of Naval Architects. The House could debate also a scrap-and-build policy, many other trade and aid packages and Third world orders that British Shipbuilders could secure if there were more support from the Government.

This matter is specific. After all, we have just had a statement from the Government which affects not only Govan but Sunderland, Appledore, and the Ferguson yard on the Clyde, the Kincaid engine works and British Shipbuilders headquarters in Benton house in Newcastle. Altogether, the statement's implications could mean that up to 25,000 jobs will be at stake, allowing for the jobs that are dependent on the people directly employed within British Shipbuilders and their employees.

The matter is urgent above all else because the uncertainty felt during the past few days, which today's statement will undoubtedly worsen, makes it virtually impossible for British Shipbuilders to obtain further orders—for instance, in NESL. It is not likely that a shipowner other than the British Government, who have consistently failed to place public sector orders, would place an order in view of the prevailing uncertainty. That is the reason above all others why the House should debate this matter.

The statement spells the end of British merchant ship building. That is absurd for an island nation. Thousands of jobs are at stake. I have argued on strategic grounds why the House should debate this matter, but we should consider also the jobs and livelihoods of those affected. We are talking about 2,414 people employed by NESL in Sunderland and 326 people employed by Sunderland Forge Services, with the jobs——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member has had the time allowed to him. He asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the developments at Govan shipyard and the future of British Shipbuilders."

I have listened with concern to the hon. Member, as I did to the questions a few moments ago. I regret that I do not consider that the matter he raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20 and, therefore, I cannot submit his application to the House.

RUC (Code of Conduct)

4.32 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday, the penultimate question on the Order Paper was to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, asking him whether he would place in the Library a copy of the RUC code of conduct. The question was tabled late the day before by the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle). The Secretary of State, with the permission of the Chief Constable of the RUC, acceded to his hon. Friend's request.

This code of conduct—indeed, the conduct of the RUC as a whole—has been a point of considerable controversy in the House and in Northern Ireland. The code was issued to the RUC last October but, despite urgings from the Opposition and from the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights in Northern Ireland, the Government and the Chief Constable steadfastly refused to publish the document, which was meant to instil confidence in the administration of law and justice in Northern Ireland.

Last Friday, despite the question which was tabled, the RUC was reluctant to give the information to the press in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland Members were already in their constituencies and the parties had not been informed of the Government's intention. No copies were available in the Lower Gallery until late in the afternoon. The Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights in Belfast, although it has read about it in the newspapers, has yet to receive a copy of the code.

In the past, Mr. Speaker, you have frequently deprecated the attitudes of Governments and Ministers who place questions—avoiding controversy on the Floor of the House—when they have a complete change in policy. The Government have issued documents of controversy concerning the administration of law and justice in Northern Ireland, issues that they have dodged on the Floor of the House during the past six months. My point of order is this: how can you defend the rights of hon. Members to examine the Administration if they choose this method to avoid being questioned by Members with legitimate interests and, in particular, when they fail by their action to instil confidence in law and order in Northern Ireland but rather show that they are weakening it by their attitude?

Mr. Speaker: I am aware that this has been a matter of controversy in the House but, equally, I am not responsible for questions on the Order Paper or for questions that are answered. Nothing out of order has taken place.

Single Internal Market

4.34 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware that the Government today announced their proposals for the completion of the single internal market by 1992. The campaign was launched by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The issue is of immense importance to the country and to our constituents.

No statement is being made in the House or in the other place. Copies of the press release of the Department of Trade and Industry and the Prime Minister's speech are even now not yet available in the House of Commons Library. We have merely been summoned to a private briefing by the Secretary of State at Lancaster house, not even to a meeting in the Palace of Westminster.

I appreciate that you cannot force Ministers to make a statement, Mr. Speaker, but will you state again that the proper place, first and foremost, to announce matters of public policy is in the House and that not to do so is a gross and unreasonable discourtesy?

Mr. Speaker: That would certainly be the case if there were any change of policy.

Mr. Blair: There was.

Mr. Speaker: I recollect that the 1992 matter has been frequently mentioned in the House, and I am sure that it will be frequently mentioned between now and 1992.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the Wolverhampton Urban Development Area Order 1988 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Wakeham.]*

Local Government Finance Bill (Allocation of Time)

Resolved,

That the Report [14th April] from the Business Committee be now considered.—*[Mr. Wakeham.]*

Question, That this House doth agree with the Committee in its resolution, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee)—[Mr. Wakeham.]—and agreed to.*

Following is the Report of the Business Committee:

That—

(1) the order in which proceedings on Consideration are taken shall be new Clauses 1, 2, 5 and 7, Clauses 1 and 2, Schedule 1, Clauses 3 to 15, new Clause 13, Clauses 16 to 21, Schedules 2 and 3, Clauses 22 to 28, new Clauses 8, 9 and 16, Clauses 29 to 43, Schedule 4, Clauses 44 to 48, Schedules 5 and 6, Clauses 49 to 51, Schedule 7, Clauses 52 and 53, Schedule 8, Clauses 54 to 69, Schedules 9 and 10, Clauses 70 to 72, Schedule 11, Clauses 73 to 81, new Clauses 4, 6 and 15, Clauses 82 to 130, Schedule 12, Clause 131, Schedule 13, Clauses 132 to 142, Schedule 14, Clauses 143 and 144, new Clause 14, remaining new Clauses and new Schedules;

(2) the allotted days which under the Order of 22nd February, as varied by the Order of 13th April, are given to the proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading shall be allotted in the manner shown in the Table set out below and, subject to the provisions of that Order as so varied, each part of the proceedings shall be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in the third column of that Table.

Table

Allotted day	Proceedings	Time for conclusion of proceedings
First day	New Clauses 1, 2, 5 and 7	10.00 p.m.
Second day	Amendments up to the end of Clause 12	7.00 p.m.
	Amendments up to the end of Clause 15 and new Clause 13	8.30 p.m.
	Amendments up to the end of Clause 20	10.00 p.m.
Third day	Amendments up to the end of Clause 22	7.00 p.m.
	Amendments up to the end of Clause 28 and new Clauses 8, 9 and 16	9.00 p.m.
	Amendments up to the end of Clause 36	10.00 p.m.
Fourth day	Amendments up to the end of Clause 81 and new Clauses 4, 6 and 15	8.00 p.m.
	Amendments up to the end of Clause 103	10.00 p.m.
Fifth day	Amendments up to the end of Clause 114	5.30 p.m.
	Amendments up to the end of Clause 144 and new Clause 14	7.30 p.m.
	Remaining new Clauses and new Schedules	9.00 p.m.
	Third Reading	10.00 p.m.

Orders of the Day

Local Government Finance Bill

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New Clause 1

SCALE OF PERSONAL COMMUNITY CHARGE PAYMENTS

'For the purposes of this part (and subject to the provisions of sections 12 and 13 below) personal community charge shall be determined according to the following scale:

(a) if the individual liable to pay the personal community charge is not liable to pay income tax, that person shall pay one half of the amount prescribed by the charging authority as the personal community charge determined in accordance with section 29 below;

(b) if the individual liable to pay the personal community charge is liable to pay income tax at the standard rate, that person shall pay the personal community charge determined in accordance with section 29 below.

(c) if the individual liable to pay the personal community charge is liable to pay income tax at the higher rate, that person shall pay one and one-half times the amount prescribed as the personal community charge determined in accordance with section 29 below.

(d) in the case of a spouse who has no income of his or her own, the level of personal community charge he or she shall be liable to pay shall be the same as that of their wife or husband.'.—*[Mr. Mates.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.36 pm

Mr. Michael Mates (Hampshire, East): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take the following: Amendment (b), in line 10, after 'charge', insert 'on sliding scale in which the community charge payable increases from one half of the amount prescribed by the charging authority to one and one half times the amount prescribed by the charging authority in proportion to income, where the community charge is'.

Amendment (c), in line 15, leave out subsection (d).

Amendment (e), in one 15, after 'spouse', insert 'or person living with another person as husband or wife as defined in section 16(7)(b)'.

Amendment (f), in line 17, at end insert 'or the person with whom they are living as if in that relationship'.

Amendment (d), in line 17, at end add—

'(2) Nothing in this section shall affect an individual's entitlement to community charge rebates calculated under the provisions of section 23 below'.

New clause 2—*Regulations on personal community charge liability*—

'(1) Liability for personal community charge shall be determined in accordance with regulations to be made under this section.

(2) The regulations shall provide that liability shall be by reference to ability to pay, and in framing the regulations ability to pay shall be determined by reference to taxable income of the person liable.'.

New clause 5—*Liability for personal community charge*

—

'(1) Liability for personal community charge shall be determined by regulations which relate the personal community charge to ability to pay.

(2) Before producing such regulations the Secretary of State shall consult the local authority associations, such groups representing ratepayers as appear to him to be concerned and such groups representing the interests of families and the interests of those on low incomes as appear to him to be concerned.

(3) In producing regulations the Secretary of State shall have regard to the concept of ability to pay exemplified in liability for income tax:

(a) before the financial year 1988-89 and

(b) in and after the financial year 1988-89.

(4) A report as to progress in producing regulations under this Section shall be laid before both Houses of Parliament at the end of a period of one month beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.

(5) Regulations under this Section shall be laid before both Houses of Parliament no later than 1st January 1989 and shall be subject to approval by each House of Parliament.'.

New clause 7—*Local income tax*—

'(1) In accordance with this Part every person resident in the area of a local authority shall be liable to pay to that local authority for any year an amount of local income tax which is determined by that authority and which is proportional to the net income of that person.

(2) A local authority shall set a rate of local income tax which is sufficient to meet their liabilities, whether in respect of a precept or a levy or otherwise, in so far as they are not met from other sources.

(3) For the purposes of this Part a local authority is:

(a) a district council

(b) a London Borough Council

(c) the Common Council of the City of London

(d) the Council of the Isles of Scilly.'.

Amendment No. 197, in schedule 2, page 82, line 22, at end insert—

'Provided that for the purposes of section *(Scale of personal community charge payments)* of this Act a registration officer may not require the production of information from an individual other than a signed statement to the effect that he is, as the case may be, a non-income tax payer, a standard-rate income tax payer or a higher-rate income tax payer.'.

Mr. Mates: New clause 1 stands in my name and those of 44 of my right hon. and hon. Friends. I should like to deal briefly with a technical matter. Some authoritative sources have said, first, that my new clause is out of order, which clearly it is not, otherwise you would not have called it, Mr. Speaker, and, secondly, that it would require a money resolution, which clearly would be unsatisfactory and would cause my hon. Friends concern. I took this matter for advice early last week and on 13 April was informed by the Clerk of Public Bills:

"As drafted your Clause would not require a money resolution. That would only be a consideration if you required the Inland Revenue to be the collecting agent",

which I do not, as I shall explain. The letter went on to suggest that I should make some consequential amendments, which have been tabled. I want to say to those of my hon. Friends who are listening to some of the arguments that, clearly, that is not what I am trying to do, nor is it the consequence of the new clause in the opinion of the officials of the House.

I have proposed, as I think is now generally known, that we introduce, instead of a flat rate charge for the community charge, a banded system with three payment plans. I can say what I have to say in shorthand because the whole debate has had a good deal of publicity and I think that most hon. Members are aware of the terms of my new clause. The first band would be those who do not pay income tax; the second, which contains 90-plus per cent. of the population, would be those who pay income tax at the standard rate; and the third would be those who pay income tax at the higher rate.

This was worked out mainly during the Christmas recess and after Second Reading, as a result of what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment said on Second Reading to a number of us who were concerned about this aspect, and this aspect alone, of the Local Government Finance Bill. He challenged us, if we knew of a better idea, to produce one. He said that if there was a way of doing it, he would consider it and, furthermore, he would allow us to have it looked at. He has been true to his word. We came up with another plan; we submitted it to him; it was looked at by officials and then he and his colleagues said, "Thank you very much. We don't like it."

I do not quarrel with that. But the Secretary of State said—this has been a large part of the debate—that the new clause was unsatisfactory because it produced

"a sudden and painful earnings trap."

That naturally caused us concern because——

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Will my hon. Friend accept that the new clause may also be unsatisfactory because it runs counter to the election manifesto on which virtually all Conservative Members fought the election? Apart from anything else, my hon. Friend must therefore explain to the House why he wants us to digress in a very basic way from the explicit terms of the manifesto on which we fought the election.

Mr. Mates: I fully intend to explain to the House why I have proposed the new clause and if my hon. Friend will allow me to do that in my own way we can perhaps then debate the proposal.

As I was saying, one of the major objections to the new clause was that it created a sudden and painful earnings trap. That would have been cause for concern and the suggestion did, indeed, worry many of my right hon. and hon. Friends. It was at that point that I went back to the Department of the Environment to speak to my hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Local Government. Let me say at this point that one of the good things about this debate is that it has been conducted throughout with courtesy and good humour. No personal attacks have been made by anybody against anybody else. We are debating principles and not personalities.

My hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Local Government then produced a graph, which has been much circulated because I produced it too. It helps the debate that we are both speaking off the same sheet of music. I then put the question to my hon. Friend—I put it again the other night to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—"Do Ministers agree or do they not that under my scheme not one person in the lower income brackets of society would lose one penny more than under the Secretary of State's scheme?" The Secretary of State has acknowledged that they would not lose, and that is now common ground between us. The phrase

"sudden and painful earnings trap"

is not the best phrase that could have been used, for the simple reason that nobody falls into that trap.

The objection has been raised that the Secretary of State's plan for rebates has a taper and therefore involves a gradual increase of a person's liability to pay as his income rises—that is shown on the graph produced by the Secretary of State—whereas my plan appears to involve a step at the point at which someone comes off the 50 per cent. rate. However, at that moment, one simply reverts to the curve that the Secretary of State has already proposed.

[Mr. Mates]

Meanwhile, a few people will have benefited—not many but some significant groups in society, the House may think. For example, married pensioners on rather high allowances who would be liable for the full charge straight away under the plan proposed by the Secretary of State will go part of the way on 50 per cent. under my scheme. My proposal will also help certain other groups, such as some of the disabled unemployed who have a high rate of allowances.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham) *rose*——

Mr. Mates: Let me just deal with what was originally the strongest objection from the Government. In my scheme, there is no sudden and painful earnings trap whatever and no one is one penny worse off under my scheme than under the Government's scheme.

4.45 pm

Mr. Redwood: Does my hon. Friend agree that under the Government's scheme, 9 million people are protected because they are on lower incomes and that, furthermore, all those protected under his scheme are protected because he has preserved the Government's protection, not by virtue of his own scheme? Therefore, if the matter is one of principle, is not that principle taken care of in the Government's proposals? Does not my hon. Friend agree that his scheme involves a large trap for those moving from 50 per cent. to 100 per cent. and from 100 per cent. to 150 per cent.?

Mr. Mates: My hon. Friend is quite right that both schemes are protected by the Government's rebate system. This debate is not about the Government's rebate system, although it may devolve on parts of it later. Of course the protection is the same with my scheme as with the Government's scheme. However, with respect, my hon. Friend is wrong in the sense that there is no trap between the 50 per cent. rate and the 100 per cent. rate. Where he is right is that there is a trap in the higher rate, and I shall come to that in a moment. I must leave this point, reiterating in the strongest terms the Government's concession that not one person who is lower paid would be worse off under my scheme. The new clause must be considered in that light. It may have other defects and other merits, but it is simply not the case that it is a trap for the less well off.

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): I appreciate, as no doubt does the whole House, that my hon. Friend's desire is to help the most disadvantaged in our society. Can he say approximately how many will benefit under his scheme who would not benefit under the Government's scheme?

Mr. Mates: I cannot say precisely, because the Government cannot tell me precisely. I asked the Government and, in his letter to me, the Secretary of State replied that it would be a small group. I believe that the reason why neither he nor I can answer my hon. Friend's question is that the Government have not finally worked out their scheme. I do not criticise them for that, but the fact that they are unable to tell me means, alas, that I am unable to tell my hon. Friend.

Let me deal with the step between the standard rate taxpayer and the man on higher rate tax. It is right to assert in that case that there is a step. It has been argued that £1 of extra income might produce a large extra responsibility for community charge. There is a step, but I must challenge my hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Local Government, who talks about a step of hundreds of pounds. He is using the worse case for his argument, which says that for someone earning about £22,000, £1 of increased income could mean liability for a further £600 of community charge.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): In Camden.

Mr. Mates: My hon. Friend says, "In Camden." If that is the case and it remains the case, we have failed in the whole object of the Bill, which is to prevent high-spending councils from levying enormous community charges by increasing accountability so that people will not stand for it. If that is going to happen—and I hope that it will—we must conduct the argument using the average increase and not the extreme increase. If we are successful in achieving our aim, the extreme increase will vanish when the Bill becomes law.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Mates: Can I just have a sentence or two? I shall certainly give way when I have finished my point.

Therefore, we must return to the argument about the average, because it is the argument about the average that my hon. and learned Friend the Minister is using. I concede that he is right that, at the £22,000 a year level, a few pounds of extra income will create an extra liability of £85—half the average community charge. If I may say so, for someone on £22,000 income, that represents one ticket to the theatre and one dinner. I do not believe that, given the gains that they will receive from the abolition of rates, the better-off will be unhappy about paying that sum.

Mr. Leigh: I am afraid that my hon. Friend has to recognise that as a result of his proposals some married couples may have to pay up to £2,400. That is a very expensive trip to the theatre. The result of the new clause would be to allow Left-wing councils, which he has opposed all his life, to drive enterprise out of their areas.

Mr. Mates: I have to say to my hon. Friend, "I am sorry, you are wrong." If my hon. Friend wants to make a speech and produce these figures I shall certainly answer him. I am merely returning to the principle behind my argument and was simply telling the Minister, who is trying to describe the step effect as a spectre of unfairness, that he must get the matter in proportion. We have conducted the whole debate on the averages across the nation, and under my scheme the average liability for one person is £85. My hon. and learned Friend the Minister shakes his head. Would he like to intervene?

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Michael Howard): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his invitation to intervene. If the community charge had been in force in 1987-88, the average would have been £224. Half of that is not £85 but £112, and since, under my hon. Friend's scheme, wives would pay at the same rate as husbands, it is perfectly possible for someone who receives a rise of £1 a year in income to end up, on the average community charge, paying an extra £224.

Mr. Mates: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend and, of course, I accept his correction. On Second

Reading, he was working on a standard community charge of £176. It has now gone up, but that is another matter. Instead of talking about £85, I am now talking about £112. That is not an unreasonable step for someone on that level of income who has, quite rightly in the view of most hon. Members, gained so much from what we have done to the taxation system over the years.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): Surely the people who would be liable for that step are the people who would gain on their overall budget from the tremendous rate reductions that would follow the introduction of the community charge. They would be paying less.

Mr. Mates: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point when he says that such people will gain most. That is right, because they have been carrying an unfair burden. They are the people who gained most from the reduction in the higher rate of taxation in the last Budget. That is right too, because we want a lower-taxed society. If we are to achieve that we must add the responsibility to those who will be best off when we have completely revised our old and outdated system of rating—as we are doing. When we turn to a new system, it must be fair. My hon. and learned friend mentioned a salary increase of £1. If a person on a salary of about £22,000 a year gets an increase of £1, his first step is to change his accountant.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that many people with such incomes run small businesses and are self-employed, and that it may not be possible for them to take the sort of action that my hon. Friend implies?

Mr. Mates: I shall leave my hon. Friend to argue that point for himself.

I shall now explain to the House the method for collecting the community charge under the new clause. This has exercised the minds of many people who have looked at my clause and asked whether it will work and could the charge be collected. Fear has been based on argument from certain sources that has not reflected the way in which my scheme would work. I say again that in trying to work this out I have tried to follow precisely the Government's scheme in every regard so that the minimum change is necessary to the Bill consequent upon my new clause being accepted. The same registration process applies as applies under the Government's scheme. The Government's scheme has some difficulties, but my scheme produces no more.

The same form would be sent by local authorities to every person liable for the community charge under my scheme as under the Government's scheme. It is precisely the same system. So far there is no increase in bureaucracy or complexity because the bureaucracy and complexity are those that will be required anyway. I propose that there should be three more questions on the form. They are questions that go the heart of the concern of many people and are about the tax situation of the person being questioned.

The first extra question is: "Do you pay income tax?" If the answer is no, there is an assessment of 50 per cent. of the community charge. The second question is one that obviously applies to most people. It is: "Do you pay income tax at the standard rate?" If the answer is yes, the assessment is the standard rate community charge. The third question is: "Do you pay tax at the higher rate?" If the answer is yes, there is an assessment of 150 per cent.

It would be very difficult and wrong for that information to be traded between the Inland Revenue and the local authorities. In conceiving the scheme I have made quite sure that that does not need to happen. I know that that was the cause of a good deal of concern among some of my hon. Friends. The form is completed on a self-assessment basis and signed with the same implications as apply on the form anyway about whether the person has told the truth.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Is it not right to say that some people would not be able to verify their income because many self-employed people do not know their income until two or three years afterwards, when the accounts are made up?

Mr. Mates: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and to other hon. Friends for making these points. I am coming to them because I know that they need to be answered. If I could be allowed to complete a point before being asked to give way, it would save the House a little time. I assure my hon. Friend that I shall come to the question that he asked.

Three extra questions are on the form. Self-assessment takes place and the form is signed. The community charge becomes payable, as under the Government's scheme, and is paid to the local authority. There would have to be inserted in the Bill a power for a random check of whether what people had said was correct. I shall explain that, because it has caused anxiety to some of my hon. Friends. We would have to give the local authority power to send the Inland Revenue a random selection of answers received from the taxpayers, saying that Mr. X has stated that he is a standard rate taxpayer and asking if that is correct, or that Mr. Y has said that he is a higher rate taxpayer and is that correct.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that this was a fiscal nuclear deterrent, in that it would be oppressive because those who were randomly selected would have to have all their affairs gone through. That is not at all the case. My right hon. Friend is not quite right. Ninety nine per cent. of the people of Britain are honest.

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): Is that a Government statistic?

Mr. Mates: My right hon. Friend asks whether that is a Government statistic. I shall not answer that question.

Most people in this country are honest, so in most cases the reply will come back from the Revenue that the answers are correct. That will be the end of the matter, because that is the only check that has to be made. In a small minority of cases, the Revenue will say that the answers are not correct. If that is so, an offence has been committed and the law will take its course in precisely the way that it will have to take its course if an offence is committed in the completion or non-completion of the Government's present registration and assessment form. Aside from that, there is no change in the system that I have devised.

Mr. Butterfill: On that point, does my hon. Friend accept that it will also be necessary to include on the form the tax reference of the person concerned? If that is not done, it would be difficult for the Inland Revenue to obtain

[Mr. Butterfill]

the information. Will he explain how he will deal with the problem of husbands and wives who are separately taxed or who may have the option to be separately taxed?

Mr. Mates: All those are complex arguments, which I shall be happy to explain to my hon. Friend, but I shall not take the time of the House to do so now. Suffice it to say that when the matter was examined—I want to be careful about how I say this—the Department of the Environment consulted the Inland Revenue. At my meetings thereafter, that issue did not form part of any objection to my proposals.

I do not wish to go further than that because I have been saddened by remarks over the weekend suggesting that I have behaved dishonourably by disclosing advice given to me by officials, courtesy of the Department. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State accepts that I have not made one remark about anything said by any official that was not said in the presence of Ministers. What was said to me in my one private meeting with a group of officials has never been made public—unless it was something that Ministers had heard about and to which they had assented. I do not think that that is a dishonourable way to proceed.

5 pm

On the operation of my scheme, I concede that some people will fall between two barriers—but it will not affect anyone at the lower end who will be taken care of under the Government's scheme. The only problem with lack of knowledge might arise between the standard rate and the higher rate levels. A few people will face some difficulty and will need advice. I concede that that is a complication that does not exist in the Government's scheme. However, the whole of the tax system is riddled with complications that are constantly referred to and fro between the Inland Revenue and the individual. Only a small number will hop over the barrier—*[Interruption.]* It is true. Only 9 per cent. fall in the higher rate band, so only a small number will be affected.

The problems of evasion have been raised, but they are the problems of the Government's scheme, not my scheme. There is no greater opportunity for evasion under my scheme than there is under the Government's scheme. It is true that there will be problems with collection, but they are the problems of the Government's scheme, not my scheme. The Government have conceded that collection will be a difficult task and also that the scheme will be easier to evade than the current rating system. That is why it will cost twice as much and will require twice as many staff. We understand all the difficulties involved in a radical change in the system—but they are inherent in the Government's scheme, not my scheme. The only problem inherent in my scheme and not in the Government's scheme is that of assessment.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): My hon. Friend's scheme is based on the conception that a tax system with only two bands will exist for ever. If there were to be a Labour Government, who would introduce many more bands, where would that leave my hon. Friend's scheme?

Mr. Mates: I hesitate to tell my hon. Friend where my scheme would go should there ever be a Labour Government, but I do not think that it would be a vastly different place from where the Government's scheme would go. The point is that there will not be a Labour Government. That is why we must legislate properly now.

The Government have conceded that my scheme is practical. The Secretary of State said that it could work if the Government wanted it to work—but they do not like my scheme as much as they like their own scheme.

Mr. Timothy Wood (Stevenage): Can my hon. Friend clarify the effect of paragraph (d)? If an individual is earning £25,000 a year and his wife takes a part-time job and earns £1,000 a year, would that couple transfer from paying one and a half times two standard community charges—that is, three community charges—to paying two community charges? Would that additional income result in a reduction in the community charge?

Mr. Mates: If I understand my hon. Friend's question correctly, the answer is no—*[Interruption.]* I beg hon. Members to listen and not to scoff. It is a complex argument. We want to understand such complex legislation. I know that some Opposition Members are not in the least bit interested in understanding. We are trying to arrive at a better solution. A little less scoffing and a little more listening would help.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Mr. Wood) is not right in his assumption. Paragraph (d), as amended—I had made a technical drafting error—puts the spouse in the same position as the wage earner if there is only one wage earner in the family. I acknowledge that that is not an ideal solution and, indeed, it involves a certain amount of rough justice. However, the rough justice will apply only at the upper end, and not in the middle band where 90 per cent. of people fall, who will pay the same as under the Government's scheme. I believe that to be in the overall interest of families.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire, West): I am concerned about a point of fairness. If my hon. Friend's new clause is intended to produce a fairer scheme, why was it not considered to be a fairer scheme when the House discussed the Scottish legislation? Why does my hon. Friend propose a community charge for England and Wales that will be different from that already agreed for Scotland? That is most unfair.

Mr. Mates: I do not want to be drawn down the Scottish road, but if we were to discuss the way in which the charge has been introduced in Scotland, there might be even greater internal dissent. If the House accepts my new clause, obviously there must be an amendment to the Scottish legislation. The same system must apply in Scotland as applies in England and Wales. We now have the advantage of a certain amount of experience in Scotland.

Having established that my new clause is practicable, I shall explain why I am introducing it. This relates to a question asked earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth). When we started down this most difficult road in an attempt to reform a complex, outdated and unfair system, we said that we would abolish the rating system and replace it with a more broadly based tax that would be based on people's ability to pay—*[Interruption.]* That is true; we said that in 1974. We said that the rating system was intolerable and that, as a party,

we would do something about it. We have been trying to do so since 1974. Until we decided to take the plunge last year, we had failed.

Many efforts were made during our first eight years in office to find a better system—a Green Paper was published, a study carried out and a committee established, but each time we reached the reluctant conclusion that to proceed with any of the options identified would be less satisfactory than staying with the present system. Many of us were unhappy about that. Many were the voices from Conservative Benches saying to the Government, "Get on with it and do something." To their credit, the Government have done just that. I am behind the Government 90 per cent. of the way. Having said that there were three legs to the change, I strongly believe that we have dropped one leg. To many of us, that has made the tax not ideal and not fair.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): As a new Member of this House, who was not here in 1974, I find my hon. Friend's argument slightly disingenous and unfair. I fought the election on the 1987 Conservative party manifesto. I assumed that 632 other Conservative candidates fought the election on it. In that there was a quite clear pledge to a fixed community charge. To my mind, the Government have been implementing that pledge, not reneging on it. My hon. Friend's amendment seeks to stop the Government from doing what they are pledged to do.

Mr. Mates: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. Of course I was coming to what we said in the last manifesto. The line before the line to which my hon. Friend referred states that we shall introduce a fairer system. That is at the heart of the debate. That is why there is some difference on Conservative Benches about the best way in which to proceed.

Several of my hon. Friends have asked me why I have not accepted the concession that the Government made on Thursday and withdrawn my objections. To their credit, the Government conceded that their scheme was not fair enough, did not do enough for the less well off members of society, and that more help must be given. I congratulate them. It is always difficult for a Government to change course. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—I suspect, with tongue slightly in cheek—said that he had not been responding to pressure and that he wanted to do it, anyway. I do not know.

The House will recall that, in 1986, we found ourselves in major difficulty with the revaluation of the rating system in Scotland. On that occasion, in much more difficult economic times, the Government had to make an emergency concession of £100 million or so to alleviate the worst of the hardship that the revaluation would cause. That did not make the rating system any fairer, and nor, with the greatest respect to my right hon. Friend, will the concession that my right hon. Friend made on Thursday.

An injustice is not removed by throwing money at it. It may be made less painful, but, if the system is not fair, it must be changed, not the amount of help that is available to it. That is why the *Daily Express*, under Saturday's banner headline,

"Not a Penny More",

could not have misunderstood what my hon. Friends and I are seeking more directly. We have not asked for a penny more. We are not asking for a penny more.

One of the reasons I came to the conclusion that this is the best way in which to present an alternative is that fundamental to everything that I am doing has to be the fact that it does not cost any more money. If it did, all my hon. Friends would say, "There he is. He is asking for more public expenditure." I am not asking for more public expenditure. It is right that we should control and restrict public expenditure, but, when we are reforming the whole taxation system, at the heart of it we have to make it fairer.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I want to ask my hon. Friend a point of clarification with regard to the position of a spouse—husband and wife. Am I right in believing that if one of the husband or wife goes into the higher rate of taxation then they will both have to pay the higher rate of community charge?

Mr. Mates: No, my hon. Friend is not right, unless they are both earners. The only time when these things are done is when there is a non-earning spouse. I use the word "spouse" because some people regard the word "wife" as sexist. Again, it is a matter of detail.

5.15 pm

My right hon. Friend has met some objections and he has responded to pressures. I ask him to remember what is written in St. Matthew's gospel, which states:

"Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain."

I am not asking for a confrontation with the Government—not to have a knock-down, drag-out fight at 10 o'clock tonight. I hope that that will not happen. I hope that those who listen to the debate will hear an acknowledgement by the Government that, in future, they will base the Bill on the principle that it must relate to ability to pay. If my right hon. Friend says that, but then says, "I think that your scheme is crazy, bad, mad and hare-brained," that is fine with me, because I shall withdraw it, knowing that the Government, with the resources that they have, are bound to come to a better conclusion than I. But the Government need to change that one fundamental principle.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that 50 per cent. of local government expenditure in most areas comes from the rate support grant that is provided by the Treasury? It is means-tested and comes from income tax. With my right hon. Friend's system, at least half the community charge is means-tested. Surely that meets my hon. Friend's argument.

Mr. Mates: As I have tried to demonstrate, that meets half the problem. The system has quite rightly tackled inability to pay, but it does not tackle ability to pay. The people who are most concerned about the present system are those who are just above that level—the people who are not at the level at which they get subsidies, but are struggling to make ends meet. As presently drafted, the Bill asks them to pay precisely the same in community charge as the richest alongside them in their communities.

I am conscious that I have detained the House for too long, and I apologise. It is because of the number of interruptions. I say to those of my right hon. and hon. Friends who have been good enough to support me and to sign my motion that I do not find it comfortable to stand here, offering criticism to the Government. I did not want the matter to be brought to a head in a full-scale debate.

[Mr. Mates]

For four months, I have quietly tried to persuade Ministers and others that we can make the change without destroying the legislation. I still believe that we can make the change without destroying the legislation. I believe, too, that my right hon. and hon. Friends who have come with me so far will make up their minds tonight, not about the minutiae—but not about an odd little trap or an odd wart here and there in the legislation. For goodness' sake, if the legislation were perfect, we would not set out with 139 Government amendments—that is after the Committee's deliberations and Second Reading.

My new clause should not be dismissed as cursorily as some have tried to dismiss it. It is worthy of debate. If, at the end of the evening, there is no concession from the Government, those who believe that this tax must be fair have to go into the Division Lobby to say so. The legislation will go on to the statute book, will become law, and will be effective in 1990. Only then will we know what the people outside this place think about it. Only then will we be able to gauge the effect of the measures that we are taking now.

I say to my hon. Friends, with the greatest respect, that, whatever else this new legislation is known as, it will be known as a Tory tax. We can accept taxation. Although no one likes it, taxation is acceptable to the vast bulk of people of this country because by and large it is perceived to be fair. My sole anxiety is that we must make every effort to see that this piece of taxation is seen to be fair and thus acceptable to the people at large.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): It might be to the advantage of the House if I give my response to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) and his new clause. I realise that new clauses 2, 5 and 7 have not yet been debated, although they are down for debate at this time, but it is true that all these new clauses suggest alternatives to the Government's plans for raising local revenue. I make no complaint that we are still discussing the principle of that matter even after two years and a very long Committee stage. It is right that we should. It gives me one more opportunity to demonstrate that we have the best solution.

Our solution is based on two principles. First, it makes nearly everyone contribute, at least a little, to local revenues, so that all can participate in democracy at local level. Secondly, the charge is moderated according to people's ability to pay, without detracting from the first principle of accountability. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) spelt out the Labour party's alternative and I do not intend to dwell on it. I should like to close, but I think that I should address myself to my hon. Friend's new clause. The right hon. Gentleman suggested a local income tax. He is trying to achieve that in new clause 5 and in the amendments to my hon. Friend's new clause. He also suggested capital value rates. To demolish that suggestion would be a very nice debate, but I leave that to others. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) has tabled new clause 7—this is about the only issue on which all wings of the erstwhile alliance agree—which proposes a local income tax.

The longer our debate has gone on, the more I have examined other alternatives. The more I have heard the arguments for those other proposals, the more I have become personally convinced of the merits of our proposals. Locally determined taxes, based in any way on the national income tax system, are all unsuitable as a method of raising money from local people, even for part of the cost of local services. I shall give hon. Members a number of reasons. In this country, local authorities are relatively small geographically, but large in terms of expenditure. The objection that I shall give applies to all the new clauses that we are discussing, and I want to explain why.

First, a local income tax, or any variant of it, would diminish local accountability. Local services, provided by the local authorities for the local community, benefit everyone in that community. Everyone benefits, so everyone should contribute. Everyone should have the right, through the ballot box, to influence the level of service that is provided and the price that they must pay through their taxes. That is the essence of accountability and of responsible democratic control of the services provided by local authorities.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Will the Secretary of State tell the House why, in his book, one principle is applicable for local government, but a different principle, whereby people pay for national services according to their ability to pay, has been endorsed for decades by his and every other Government in this country? Why are there different standards for the two levels of government and not the same principle—no taxation without representation—for both, as we are used to in this democracy?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman would be wise to wait to hear what I shall say. I shall have ample response to the points that he has raised.

Secondly, the large variations in spending between the different authorities cause significant, and in some cases substantial, variations in the rate of taxation between neighbouring areas. The result is a strong incentive for local brain drains, whereby it pays people to move from one area to another to reduce their tax liability. The incentive is at its most severe with a full local income tax, and it is most ameliorated with a local community charge. My hon. Friend's suggestion in new clause 1 for a three-band system is somewhere in between.

A tax of this sort causes high spending to feed on itself by driving out the better-off and causing the need for higher charges on the less well-off. The unequal distribution of the better-off is bound to set up a need for resource equalisation and, as its effects work through, the resource equalisation system——

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: No.

——gets more and more complex and larger and larger, as we have discovered with the present rate support grant system. That applies to new clause 1.

Thirdly, the better-off tend already to be concentrated in some council areas, and, alas, absent from others. The grant has either to be switched from the richer to the poorer areas, meaning that people can no longer equate the size of their community charge to the performance of their own council, so weakening the accountability, or—I do not know whether my hon. Friend would like that—they would have to live with the situation where the

better-off areas may have a lower community charge than the poorer areas, because they would have access to a number of people paying one and a half shares. That is the obverse of what we should be seeking to achieve.

Fourthly, the technical arguments are also strong. The Inland Revenue knows that people's incomes are for national income tax purposes, but does not know where they have their sole or main residence. Neither the present system, nor those splendid new computers that the Inland Revenue is soon to commission, tell us that. To graft a system of local charging on to taxable income requires that local authorities not only have to compile a register of persons having their sole or main residence in each area —as my hon. Friend generously acknowledged—but they have to establish what their incomes are, or at least what band of income they fall into for my hon. Friend's scheme. That register would have to be a register of all adults, whether they are non-income, standard rate or higher rate income tax payers, and not just the heads of households. That is an immensely complicated administrative task.

Paul Beresford, the leader of Wandsworth borough council, expressed this point very clearly only last week, when he said:

"If the amendment were accepted, one could easily imagine the typical elector's response, having registered for community charge, to find that they also have to declare their personal tax bracket. Furthermore, these well-meaning Back-Benchers have not foreseen the enormous scale of bureaucratic time that will be required to be spent on extracting the information, locating the relevant tax office, checking their declarations and sorting out the inevitable discrepancies. Over and above that, they apparently have given little thought about the number of times this effort must be repeated every year to deal with the changes of residence, jobs and earnings, as well as tax system changes. It would be well nigh impossible to get to grips with the unimaginable complexity of a rebate system in which a small rise in income will usually lead to a lower rebate, but will sometimes lead to a higher rebate, coupled with a doubling in the underlying charge".

The Association of District Councils, which is controlled by the Conservative party, has expressed similar views, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East knows.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): I do not quarrel with my right hon. Friend's quotation, but is he aware that the Conservative leader of the Association of County Councils, which is opposed to the present scheme, endorsed that body's opposition, and said:

"On this crucial issue the Association wishes to see ability to pay reflected to a greater extent than in the present proposal."

Some councillors may feel that the proposals that have been put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) do not make a great deal of sense, but the general view of Conservatives in the Association of County Councillors is directly to the contrary.

5.30 pm

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend is confusing two things. At this point I am talking entirely about the possibility of administering the scheme and what that would involve. What the ACC has said is not about that; it is about the principle. I am talking about the administration of the proposal.

Mr. Devlin: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is very much to be welcomed that, for the first time since the matter came before the House, there is an element of real opposition and of real contribution to the legislation as it goes through the House? We sat through many hours in Committee, during which Opposition Members contributed little, if anything. Therefore, the debate is limited to discussion among ourselves as to how best to implement the financing of local government.

Mr. Ridley: I agree with my hon. Friend. I only hope that the Opposition's contribution to today's debate will not simply be trying to shout down that which they do not like, while my right hon. and hon. Friends and I debate the issue seriously.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West) *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: No, I have given way already.

Fifthly, any tax of this sort has to be enforced. There are two ways in which it could be enforced. The first is that the Inland Revenue could be required to tell councils the taxable income of each of its residents. This would be deeply offensive to the House on privacy and data protection grounds, as well as being beyond the present administrative competence of the Revenue.

The second would be a form of self-assessment— *[Interruption.]* The Opposition are living up to what I predicted they would do. They are trying to shout down the debate. The second is a form of self-assessment, as suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East. He suggests that everyone should have to declare his status as a taxpayer. There would then have to be some verification procedure, and that is where the difficulty arises. I gather that my hon. Friend suggests that the council could challenge one in every 1,000 or in every 5,000 —what it thought appropriate—and ask the Inland Revenue to adjudicate on whether that person is in the category that he has declared.

The problem that the Inland Revenue does not know where people live becomes immediately relevant from the moment that the first challenges start. Apart from that, there is the awful opportunity that this would give a local authority to discriminate between those to whom it issued a challenge. I can see politics coming into this. It is an appalling prospect that accusations could be made against citizens on a random basis, with no evidence whatsoever, on whether they fell into one category or another. Who would be the final arbiter? Would the Inland Revenue decide, or would there be some appeal? Surely there should be an appeal either to the commissioners or to some other tribunal or court, to decide whether the details of that person's income as given by the Revenue were correct.

We had a debate in Committee about the number of people called John Smith who might get mixed up, even in the same local authority area. We must make sure that we get it right, but my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East has not so far suggested any ways in which that could be done. What would the penalties be?

Mr. Simon Hughes *rose*——

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North) *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: I have already given way to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes); I give way to the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid).

Dr. Reid: As the Secretary of State is labouring the point about a bureaucratic nightmare, will he explain why

[Dr. Reid]

all investigations into income tax can be made with the full support of the Government, without it being a bureaucratic nightmare, when it comes to housing benefit, family income credit or finding out whether an old-age pensioner has £6,000 in the bank, or when it comes to preventing someone from gaining benefits from the social security system, but when it comes to applying to the same system to income verification to alleviate the poorest from paying the poll tax it suddenly becomes impossible and a bureaucratic nightmare?

Mr. Ridley: Because the social security system will tell the collecting officer, under the community charge, what percentage should be raised from each payer according to the rebate that he is due. Councillors will not get to know about it.

I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East, to say what the penalties would be for a false declaration. How would he cope with the fact that some incomes are not determined for several years after the tax year has ended? He must make some plan for giving refunds to those who can prove that they were not in the bracket in which they originally thought they might be when they had to fill in the form. That is one of the great difficulties. A person would be asked to state the category that he was in before he could know what his income would be. All those problems would have to be thought out and solved, if solved they could be, which I doubt.

Sixthly, the concept of basing some form of tax on national income tax is full of anomalies. What may be appropriate as a national relief from income tax may not be appropriate as a local relief. For instance, mortgage interest relief, age allowance, working expenses and even life assurance premium relief all shift the point at which one moves from one level of national income tax to another, yet is it right that they should affect one's liability for a local charge, which is in the nature of paying for the services that are received? A cut in the mortgage rate because interest rates are falling could have the effect of pushing people into a higher band or rate of community charge.

Moreover, our rebates are closely aligned to the ability to pay. They are based on assessing the needs of the less well off and then assessing their means. Either benefit or community charge rebate is aligned on the gap between the two. Income tax takes no account of needs—it merely takes a slice of the means. Basing any system of local taxation on income tax scales is bound to be unfair to the less well-off.

For all those reasons, the income tax system is not a suitable vehicle for a locally variable tax on the better-off. It is both easier and fairer to achieve any redistribution of income for which hon. Members seek through the national taxation system.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ridley: If I may just finish this point, I shall certainly give way.

Hon. Members can express their views about that proposal in the coming Finance (No. 2) Bill. If it were thought right to charge the equivalent of one and a half community charges on higher rate taxpayers, as my hon. Friend suggests, it could easily be done by increasing the higher rate of income tax from 40p to 41·5p. That would produce the same amount of money.

The logical extension of that would then be to ensure that the amount raised found its way equally to local authorities through the Government grant system. For those who wish to achieve that objective—I am delighted that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has been able to reduce the top rate of income tax, as I think my hon. Friends are, and I do not want him to increase it again—that system avoids all the complexities, problems and difficulties that I have been highlighting.

Mr. Rathbone: To return to my right hon. Friend's point about the inequities of the new clause for the lower paid, how can he say that it has any effect on the lower paid when it embraces all the Government's actions to alleviate the burden of the community charge on the lowest paid and when 90 per cent. or so of those who pay income tax will pay exactly the same charge as the Government are asking them to be charged? The new clause will have no effect on the lower paid.

Mr. Ridley: I have a great deal to say about that, but in order not to dodge the question my answer is that if more money is to be spent on the less well-off by helping them with their charges, there are much more accurate ways of targeting the more deserving, which the Government have already adopted, as I shall show.

That link with grant, and thereby with national taxation, brings me to the next crucial point. It is necessary to consider the community charge, not in isolation, but as one source from which money will be raised for local services. The community charge in England will provide only about one quarter of the total cost of local services—half will come from Government grants paid from progressive national taxation. That is why households with the top 10 per cent. of earnings will contribute about 15 times as much in total towards the cost of local services as the bottom 10 per cent. Therefore, payment for local services is progressive and based on the ability to pay.

I quote in aid the words of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), who is in a distant quarter of the Chamber—perhaps this is why—when he announced the Government's response in 1977 to the Layfield committee. He said:

"the Government finance about 60 per cent. or more of local government expenditure through the rate support grant. That is finance out of general taxation to which other people contribute just as much as householders do."—*[Official Report,* 19 May 1977; Vol. 932, c. 720]

The right hon. Gentleman was absolutely right. He realised that the best way that the better-off could be made to pay more was through their share of the cost of Government grant. That must be right. That also means that our proposals are related to the ability to pay, both at the top end of the scale and at the bottom.

All these thoughts lead one to conclude that the best system of financing local government based on the ability to pay is, first, that everyone should make a direct contribution to achieve accountability; secondly, to use the social security system to reduce the liability of the less well-off; and, thirdly, to finance the lion's share of spending by progressive taxation collected by the national income tax system and paid as grant. In that way the better-off contribute the highest share. That is precisely what we have done.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): Would the logic of my right hon. Friend's final comment about moving the bulk of the burden on to direct taxation be to transfer the bulk of the cost of education to progressive taxation, such as Lord Joseph proposed, with a 75 per cent. education grant? A specific grant could let the Government off the hook, in that the poll tax could be cut across the board.

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend is right in theory. If more money is transferred to Government grant, it has the effect of reducing the community charge and increasing what the better-off pay to Government grant. That figure need not be related to any particular services, whether education or police. That is not the right calculation.

The right calculation is how big a share should come through the grant, and what should be the resulting levels of community charges? All that is open for discussion and debate, and whatever the answer, the mechanism is in the Bill and would be wrecked by the new clause.

There are additional difficulties with the proposal in the new clause for a one and a half charge for higher rate taxpayers. I expect that that will not satisfy the Labour party, which wants to hit the better-off. Nor does it raise much money—about £200 million, which is sufficient only to cut the basic community charge by 10p a week for those on the ordinary rate of charge, most of which, if not all, would probably be lost because of the extra costs of administration, which, we are assured by local authorities, would be substantial.

5.45 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): The Secretary of State said that that would cut 10p for the ordinary ratepayer. If there is this much-vaunted rebate extension scheme, which he has announced proudly, it will mean that a student nurse studying in Camden who previously paid 17 per cent. of her income, equivalent to £15·03 in community charge, will pay £14·87, giving her a benefit of 16p. Is the difference between 10p and 16p particularly relevant in this case?

Mr. Ridley: That depends on many circumstances, and I shall come to the details of the rebate scheme shortly.

The new clause produces some additional awkward side effects, apart from the administrative problems. The right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) identified these and mentioned the large step in liability as one's income passes a certain point. I am sorry that he is not here this afternoon. There are two such steps: one when someone first pays income tax, contrary to what my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East alleged, and the other when one reaches the higher rate of tax. They could easily be £200 or £300 steps for a couple, and more in the high-spending areas. As my hon. Friend wishes, I shall quote the average figures.

Obviously, there will be a smaller trap if one goes from the half rate to the whole rate only if the rebate is still there when one travels down that slope, but in many cases there will be a 50 per cent. increase in charge when tax liability is reached. Those are serious traps which could cause people to avoid overtime or more wages. Indeed, they are probably the highest incentive imaginable to operate on the black economy.

The Leader of the Opposition was right to dissociate himself from the new clause on that ground alone, and I am sure that he will have the courage of his convictions and not vote for it. I shall be glad to hear what he will do. He made it clear that he thought that the new clause was bad. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) has bullied him to stay away from the debate because he is a doubter in his own ranks.

With their amendments, Opposition Members have tried to turn new clause 1 into a more overt form of local income tax, which is at least logical in view of all the difficulties of my hon. Friend's scheme. That means that there is no halfway house between the community charge and local income tax, and I accept that that is what hon. Gentlemen are trying to achieve and point out.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): I am listening extremely carefully to what my right hon. Friend is saying, and he has spent some time saying how unfair the new clause is. Before he sits down, will he explain to those who support the new clause how fair the Government's proposal will be?

Mr. Ridley: The answer to that is yes. I understand fully the anxiety that my hon. Friends have expressed about the position of the less well-off under our rebate scheme. Throughout our deliberations on the subject, we have been acutely aware of the need to protect people on low incomes from hardship, and I am satisfied that the generous rebate system will achieve precisely that. As the House knows, I improved it last week.

Mr. Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the rebate scheme, however generous, is subject to the capital limits from which housing benefit has suffered, whereas the scheme in new clause 1 would not be subject to capital limits?

Mr. Ridley: That is obviously right, but my right hon. Friend must admit, if he wants to base relief on ability to pay, that those with large capital have the ability to pay.

My hon. Friend's motive in trying to help people on low incomes is laudable, but his scheme does not achieve what he wishes to do. Its incidence, in terms of those whom it will help, is capricious. It does nothing for those just above benefit level—those between 80 and 50 per cent. rebate. The poorest people are already eligible for 80 per cent. rebate. It does nothing for most of those in areas with the highest community charges, and the help that it gives particular groups depends on the relationship between their tax thresholds and the benefits system. Benefits are much more closely aligned to ability to pay than is income tax, because they take account of needs as well as means. They are a much better basis for helping the least well-off.

Of course my hon. Friend is right to say that his scheme would make no one worse off, but that would happen, too, with the improved rebates that I suggested last Thursday. On the basis of 1988-89 tax thresholds, the main groups that he would help are single people living in low community charge areas and some pensioners who benefit from the higher income tax age allowances. Thus, its effects would be arbitrary. The new clause would add the quirk that, at the 50 per cent. rebate level, the rebate would not reduce as income increased until the point was reached where income tax became payable. Then there would be a sudden jump in liability, which could mean an additional £100 or £200 in community charge a year, depending on whether it was an individual or a couple, for each extra £1

[Mr. Ridley]

of income. That is another example of the step effect against which the Leader of the Opposition rightly warned.

We have made our rebate system more generous, but we have targeted it very much better. We have reduced the slope of the taper from 20 to 15 per cent. This means that a single person aged over 25 with a £300 community charge would not have to pay the full charge until his or her gross income reached £4,550 per annum, and that a married couple with two children aged under 11 would have to earn a gross income of £8,800 before all rebate was withdrawn. While preserving the principle of accountability, everyone will benefit if a council reduces its spending. We are now extending help to 9 million people in the very area about which concern has been expressed. I can think of no scheme more closely attuned to ability to pay.

My hon. Friend acknowledged that if there are difficulties—or warts, as he called them—in his scheme he would be happy for the Government to take it away and come back with an improved scheme. The hon. Member for Copeland was even more generous. He would give me power to make regulations to design a totally new tax by order, which goes even further than my hon. Friend would.

I ask the House to reject the new clause. We have looked carefully at my hon. Friend's scheme and we genuinely find it wanting in the many respects that I have described. That is not because the details are wrong and could be improved. It is not because the experts in Whitehall could make a thorough and effective job of what my hon. Friend proposes. It is because there are fundamental objections to it, such as I have been rehearsing this afternoon.

Furthermore, if the new clause found its way into the Bill there would be no further opportunity for the House to improve it. Once the Bill passes through its Report stage the House has no further opportunity to amend it. As it is a taxing motion, I should have thought that my hon. Friends would agree that the House of Commons should get the details right, and I repeat that we would have no opportunity to do so later. We would have to leave the Bill with the massive defects that I have described.

The new clause would be unworkable. We have achieved ability to pay through the rebate system at the bottom end of the scale and through asking the better-off to contribute to the grant which is the main source of revenue for local authorities. It would be a great mistake for the House to deviate from the sensible plans that the Government have proposed, and I ask hon. Members to reject the new clause.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): The hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) made a good speech—a brave speech. The Secretary of State for the Environment made a good speech, too—against a poll tax of any sort. The Secretary of State for Social Services must be thinking that there is hope for him at last. In a long speech, the Secretary of State did not answer the case put by the hon. Member for Hampshire, East, questioning the principle of ability to pay, nor did he move a single inch in that direction.

The Opposition remain implacably opposed to the idea that a flat-rate poll tax should be used to raise local government revenue. It can never be a fair or efficient tax. It will never be accepted by local government or, more importantly, by the people of Britain. We said that in December and throughout the Committee stage, and we say it again today. As the first leader in the *Financial Times* today makes abundantly clear, our arguments are well-founded.

Today the House has another chance—the best possible chance—to make the Government think again. The hon. Member for Hampshire, East deserves credit for providing that opportunity. If his new clause were carried, the Government would be forced to think again. Our purpose is to uphold our view that taxes must be fair and reflect people's ability to pay. We, the House and the whole country know that there is no willing majority for the Bill in the House of Commons. The Back-Bench opinion that has been expressed by the hon. Member for Hampshire, East and his supporters is simply the tip of a large iceberg of submerged discontent and downright opposition among Government supporters. The Secretary of State knows that full well.

6 pm

New clause 1 probably gives the House the only opportunity this evening to vote to make the Government reconsider. I agree with the hon. Member for Hampshire, East that his new clause makes modest but significant improvements to the situation. Of course there are objections to it. We have made our views clear in amendments and in new clause 5. The guillotine timetable is almost certain to prevent a debate and a vote on those amendments or the new clause.

In its published studies, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy has made it abundantly clear that a graduated tax could be made more sensitive if the Government wished it. Ministers talk of poverty traps, but the biggest poverty trap of all is a flat-rate poll tax. That is why it is so roundly and universally rejected by the people. The Secretary of State and the Government do not understand how seriously and persistently public opinion is moving against them.

Today, the Secretary of State has once again made it clear that he is not interested in fairness or the ability to pay. On 1 June 1987, in Blackburn, he said:

"I think, in terms of local authority services, people should be paying for what they get. It has nothing to do with how rich you are. In this country we are too sold on the idea that the rich should be made to pay for other people's services."

On 23 February, in Committee, he said:

"With a flat rate charge, it must be true that the burden will fall more heavily on those with low incomes than on those with high incomes. That is beyond contradiction in relation to those who pay the full community charge."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 23 February 1988; c. 936.]

At the annual meeting of his constituency association the right hon. Gentleman went further. *The Wiltshire and Gloucestershire Standard* of Friday 1 April—an appropriate day—reported:

"He added that there was no reason why local services should be paid by people according to their incomes. 'Why should a duke pay more than a dustman?' he asked. 'It is only because we have been subjected to socialist ideas for the last 50 years.'"

That gives some illustration of the depth of thought and intellect brought to bear on the matter of fair taxation by the Secretary of State.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): The hon. Gentleman may be unaware that I had my constituency association annual general meeting on Friday evening. Lest he think

that people are unaware of the implications of the poll tax, he should accept from me that those of my supporters who believe that if they benefit, they will do so at the expense of the less well-off, are not happy with that proposition.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and I applaud him for his courage in spelling out his views to his right hon. and hon. Friends. I share his sentiments.

Mr. Butterfill *rose*——

Dr. Cunningham: No, I will not give way.

Let us consider the considerable amount of time that the Secretary of State has devoted to his concession. The Government's concession to their Back Benchers, who are increasingly unhappy about the impact of the poll tax, does not resolve the essential unfairness of the tax. Conservative Members should not be taken in by the Secretary of State's claim that his concession will adequately help low-income earners. The poll tax remains unrelated to people's ability to pay and the poor will continue to subsidise the rich.

The full poll tax—an average of £450 a year for two people—will still be payable by a pensioner couple with a net income of £111 a week and a working couple with two children with a net income of £131·80 a week. The Secretary of State was forced to concede that if a person has managed throughout the whole of his life to accumulate as little as £6,000, he will get absolutely no help as a result of the Government's concession. That is the reality of the marvellous new, magnificent, generous concession that the Secretary of State has alleged that he has made.

If we take the poll tax payment of £250 a year—about the average for authorities in England—which is therefore a tax of £5 a week, it is clear that, even under the Secretary of State's scheme, a single person under 25 with take-home pay of as little as £53·40 a week will get nothing. In other words, 10 per cent. of his or her take-home pay will go to pay the tax, with no Government support. We should not fall for the blandishments of the Secretary of State that, somehow, the concession is wide-ranging and generous. It is as mean and miserable as every other aspect of the proposals.

Mr. Leigh *rose*——

Dr. Cunningham: No, I shall not give way.

Why is it that, on 23 February, in Committee, the Secretary of State considered that the taper was "generous and eminently justifiable"? He said that about the existing proposals. If he is now suddenly convinced that the taper is not fair and generous, as he then said it was, will he now apply the additional proposals to those families who will have to pay more on their rates between now and the introduction of the poll tax? Will the Government make that concession? Of course not. The Secretary of State knows that only too well.

Mr. Leigh *rose*——

Dr. Cunningham: I shall give way in a moment.

Why make a concession in an attempt to mitigate the unfairness of it all? What is the argument? The Secretary of State is simply trying to buy off the fundamental opposition of his right hon. and hon. Friends. All he is doing is leaving 26 million people liable to the totality of the flat-rate poll tax. After all that he said about his new concession, 75 per cent. of those over 18 will still have to pay the flat-rate poll tax. That major principle remains for the vast majority of people, including millions on low and average incomes. Where does that leave the famous promise of the Prime Minister? I have before me the press notice in which she promised:

"Any future local revenue should be based not on property but on the ability of people to pay."

Where is that promise now? The hon. Member for Hampshire, East is right to remind his right hon. and hon. Friends that the Government are now running away from that commitment, which was part of Tory party policy.

The poll tax continues to be a huge and growing embarrassment to the Tory party. That is best illustrated by figures published last week as a result of a MORI poll conducted in the city of Manchester. It showed that 75 per cent. of all respondents believe that the poll tax will discourage registration to vote; 63 per cent. believe that they will be worse off; 76 per cent. believe that the poll tax will involve official snooping and intruding into their personal and family affairs; and 71 per cent. believe that it will encourage the break-up of families. Since the general election there has been a 25 per cent. swing among the population away from the Government's proposals.

As a result of the Budget tax cuts, the rich will be significantly better off—£2 billion given away to 3·7 per cent. of taxpayers. Half of all tax cuts went to the top 10 per cent. of taxpayers, whereas cuts in housing benefit will damage the family income of millions of people throughout the country. The top 10 per cent. of people will, in addition, enjoy major gains because of changes in inheritance tax. That contrasts with up to 2 million people in low-income families who will receive nothing at all from those same tax cuts.

By contrast, even Government statistics show that 6 million claimants of social benefits will lose in real terms as a result of the structural changes made to the system and that 1 million people will lose in cash terms.

Mr. Leigh: Will the hon. Gentleman now give way?

Dr. Cunningham: No, I shall not.

All the time, the poll tax time-bomb proposals have been ticking away beneath the Tory party, and they will blast the incomes of millions of people who can least afford it. I say to Tory Members who are concerned about the manifest unfairness of it all that there will never be a better time or a better opportunity than tonight to make their Government pause and think again before it is too late.

In case there are one or two waverers and doubters who feel that, because of the Secretary of State's concession, they ought to abstain or even go into the Lobby with their Ministers, I will enlighten them about proposals now being discussed. I will tell them what is said in a letter to the Secretary of State from 10 Downing street about proposals now under consideration. It is headed "Community Charge Rebates" and is from someone named Paul Gray to Roger Bright, who is the Secretary of State's principal private secretary. At the top of the second page, in sub-paragraph (iv), it states:

"Further consideration was being given in a group of officials chaired by the DHSS to the implications of the decisions to raise the housing benefit rent taper from 65 per cent. to 70 per cent. in 1989-90. The results of that work, which would involve looking at other options for yielding comparable housing benefit savings, would be for a separate Ministerial consideration at a later date."

[Dr. Cunningham]

At the very time that the Government are publicly saying that they are making a concession, they are planning to raise the taper on housing benefit to take even more money away from the very people that the Government say they want to assist.

In the accompanying correspondence from the Secretary of State's office, there is a letter from a civil servant named Deborah Lamb that begins "Dear Paul", and which refers to the Secretary of State himself. It states:

"He is coming under increasing pressure in the Local Government Finance Bill where the issue is beginning to be understood by a number of backbenchers."

At last the message has got through; after two days on Second Reading and three months in Committee, at last they are beginning to understand. I can tell them that the British people are way ahead of them, because they have understood all this for a very long time. Perhaps that is the best reason of all why Conservative Members should support their hon. Friend in the Division Lobbies tonight.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. Before I call the next right hon. or hon. Member to speak, I may say to both sides of the House that a very large number of right hon. and hon. Members are wishing to catch my eye, so I appeal for brief contributions. Mr. Cranley Onslow.

6.15 pm

Mr. Onslow: It is good of you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to catch my eye, but it was not my intention to intervene at this particular moment. If I might have a bisque on it, I am sure there are others of my right hon. and hon. Friends who would much rather speak.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Mr. Julian Amery.

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion) *rose*——

Hon. Members: Opposition next!

Mr. Tony Banks: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To save you the bother of going round the Chamber and finding other Members who apparently do not wish to speak, may we have an assurance that this debate will be governed by normal conventions—that right hon. and hon. Members will have to rise and catch your eye, and that there is not a prepared list of speakers to defend the Government's position?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sorry to have wasted the time of the House. I call Mr. Julian Amery.

Mr. Amery: I was not expecting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to catch your eye so soon, but I am grateful for the opportunity. This is the first time that I have presumed to intervene in a debate on the community charge, and I must first declare an interest. For about 65 years I have lived in a rented terraced house, and I must admit that the prospective disappearance of the rating system is inevitably welcome to me. Even more welcome is the removal of the sword of Damocles of revaluation that has hung over my head.

On broader, national grounds, I welcome the community charge proposal because it enshrines in local government the principle of no representation without taxation. That is the hallmark of a mature democracy. All the same, when I first looked at the proposal and thought about it in the light of many years of electioneering, I felt deep concern. It is important that the charge should be not only fair but acceptable, and I was alarmed by the weight of taxation that will fall for the first time on people wholly unaccustomed to contributing, in any way, to local government.

Therefore, I confess that I approached the new clause with sympthy. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) bases the new clause on a claim of fairness. He thinks that the present flat rate is unfair and that the criterion should be the ability to pay. That is an arguable point. Income tax can be based on ability to pay because it is raised from a single constituency —the United Kingdom. In so far as the better-off contribute more, the less well-off are enabled to contribute less. How far does that apply to local government?

I have been unable to find a good analysis of the distribution of wealth, less wealth, and poverty in different local government areas. But ordinary observation will convince many of us that there are some local government areas, such as the city of Westminster, which contain a great body of people who are well off and which would do very well out of my hon. Friend's proposal, and that there are many industrial towns where the better off get into their motor cars and leave. They pay their taxes not where they work but where they reside. I do not think that the extra money taken from the better-off under my hon. Friend's scheme will necessarily benefit the less well-off.

I doubt whether the principle of the ability to pay can be applied locally. We do not apply it in other branches of taxation. We do not apply it in indirect taxation. We do not apply it in national insurance or rents, whether public or private. In all those cases, the system on which we fall back is the rebate. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has produced what appears to me to be a pretty generous rebate offer.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East is perhaps on rather stronger ground when he says that what matters is not so much whether it is fair as whether it seems to be fair. He advanced that argument in a very interesting newspaper article. I have questioned constituents and others on this topic. Two or three have told me that the proposed system is not fair. I asked what they meant. They did not say that it is not fair because it is not related to ability to pay; they meant that they were suddenly being asked to pay up quite a big sum when they had never paid anything before. "It is not fair" is the cry of any Englishman confronted with something unpleasant.

My guess is that the trouble with the present proposal is that it is a bit too heavy. It will not be easily acceptable because its incidence is too great. I may be wrong. If I am, then let us go along the lines that my right hon. Friend proposes. If, however, I am right, I do not think that the way to tackle the problem is the way that my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East proposes. That is because his proposal does not make the burden substantially lighter for the great majority of people.

There are ways in which the burden could be reduced. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned a few. It could be lightened by increasing Government grant to local authorities or by reducing local government's responsibilities. This is not the occasion on which to put forward concrete proposals, but I shall illustrate what I have in mind.

How far are we justified in calling education a local government service? My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science, in the absence of the Burnham committee, determines what teachers are paid. He lays down a core curriculum. He allows—some might think that he encourages—schools to opt out of local government control. How far is education still a local government matter? But it is responsible for nearly half the local government budget.

What about the police? During the miners' strike, there was an operations room in Whitehall which virtually created a centralised police force. Strong arguments are put forward by those who know more about it than I do that the career structure of the police would be more satisfactory if it was a national force. I do not know the answers and I do not pretend to, but I submit that the solution to any excessive burden which the community charge may place on the individual—taxation must be acceptable, even if it is not liked—may lie with increasing the central grant to local authorities or by cutting local expenditure.

I ask those questions to suggest that there is another way in which to consider these matters. The Bill has been called the flagship of the Government's programme. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East really think that the case that he has made is strong enough to torpedo the flagship, particularly on the eve of important local elections? I would not normally indulge in such a party political point, but the opposition is not on the other side of the House; it is over here.

I wonder whether it would not be wiser to examine the courses of action that I have suggested. I do not pretend to have an answer, but there is plenty of time. The community charge is not to be enforced for another two years or so.

Mr. Mates: I am grateful for what my right hon. Friend has said. He shows the House time and again what a wise person he is. Of course we would like this proposal to be reconsidered. I must tell my right hon. Friend with all the passion at my disposal that all I want is for the Government to say that they will look at it again. I am not trying to torpedo the Bill or to wreck it. I have looked for another course of action for three months since Second Reading, when I informed the Secretary of State that I could not support his plan and that I would look for another way. I have done that privately. I have not done it in the public eye. I have tried hard not to let the argument surface. We have been told, however, that there is no other way; that the Government's proposal is fair. Some of us do not believe that to be the case. I shall not prosecute this argument to a conclusion. I want to prosecute it until the Secretary of State or the Minister says, "We hear you; we have the point. Let us look at it again and find a fairer way." In that respect, my right hon. Friend and I are in absolute agreement.

Mr. Amery: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend says. If I understood the Secretary of State aright—I stand to be corrected—from what I could make out of it, he said, in a passage in which there was a good deal of interruption, that there are other ways in which to tackle the problem, including increasing the central grant. I do not think that he mentioned reducing local government responsibilities, but I have thrown that idea in. Am I acting as a midwife to produce a baby? There is a convenient room behind your Chair, Mr. Speaker. I should be a proud man if my intervention were to lead to a successful meeting there. I shall keep my ears and eyes closed. Meanwhile, my blessing on you.

6.30 pm

Mr. Cyril Smith (Rochdale): The suggestion of the right hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery), that this matter refers to the issue of no representation without taxation was particularly interesting. If it is true, in the case argued by the Government, that 50 per cent. of local government expenditure is paid for by taxpayers through taxes other than direct taxation, it is also true of people who do not pay rates at present. They spend money and they pay taxation through indirect taxes. It appears to me, therefore, that that particular argument is not applicable.

I often give after-dinner speeches, particularly in the north-west. Indeed, on occasions, I am paid for doing so; I make no secret of the fact. In some of those speeches I say that one of the objects of the British House of Commons is for Members of Parliament to dig as big a hole as they can and then drop their political opponents into it. I am beginning to revise my view about this place because, over the past few weeks, the Government have not needed the Opposition to dig the holes into which to drop their opponents. The Government have been perfectly capable of digging their own holes and dropping themselves into them. When we consider what has gone on over the past eight, 10 or 12 weeks, it is quite staggering, and tonight is only one more step along that road.

We set off with the under-funding of the Health Service. Then we had the Budget, with tax being reduced from a top rate of 60 per cent. to 40 per cent., and help for the rich, when so many causes that could and should have been helped—not just the Health Service, but, for example, extra improvement grants for houses—were not helped.

We then went on to the social security changes, which are absolutely disastrous, as the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said. I cannot speak for other hon. Members, but I say honestly and sincerely that I have had pensioners weeping at my surgery as a consequence of the social security changes. I have seen people who have been given a £3 a week increase in pension when their rent has increased by £9, £12 or £15 a week. This is relevant to the debate because the concessions announced by the Minister are related to the same benefit that is causing so much upset among pensioners at present—housing benefit.

Let no one be under any misapprehension. The point on which the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) intervened is absolutely vital. The sum of £6,000 —which is chickenfeed—that a pensioner may have saved for his security bars him from all rebates under the poll tax system, and he loses his entitlement to housing benefit as a consequence. The Minister's silly £1 example is ridiculous. What about the pensioner who saves £6,001? We can use that example, too, if we want to get down to silly margins of that kind.

The final element in digging this great hole is the imposition of the poll tax. While we are talking about the Government digging holes for themselves, I must say that I bet that those councillors who come up for re-election in

[Mr. Cyril Smith]

May 1990 will thank the Government for introducing this in April 1990. I have seen no good timing, political acumen and shrewdness in this place over the past few weeks.

Mr Norman Tebbit (Chingford): Is the hon. Gentleman telling us how to win elections?

Mr. Smith: I have fought 11 elections in my life and won 10 of them, so I am not complaining.

Mr. Tebbit: I can understand how the hon. Gentleman wins elections. He is a major personality in his own right. The trouble is that he is in a party that has never won a general election in the lifetime of most of us, so it comes a bit much from him and his party to be lecturing us on how to win elections when we have just won three on the trot.

Mr. Smith: The right hon. Gentleman typifies the points that I wish to raise later. The problem with the Government is that they have become power-drunk and the right hon. Gentleman is an example of that. However, although my party may not have won an election in my lifetime, it has not sacked me as chairman of my party.

In this debate I simply wanted to make a plea for the members of a section of our society about whom we hear very little, but who are deeply concerned. Thousands of people are suffering mental anguish because of the introduction of the poll tax. I refer particularly to old-age pensioners. They have never done anybody any harm. They have brought up their families. They have saved a few quid to try to give them a little security in their old age. They have been proud of what they have achieved, yet, because they have saved £6,000, they are being penalised.

Unfortunately, my ability to canvass is now extremely limited, for physical reasons, but in the past 10 days I have been out for 20 minutes at a time, knocking on doors in the run-up to the local elections in Rochdale. Many pensioners have come to me at the door and said, "Cyril, we were just managing. We have just balanced our budget. We have just got it right. Now the Government have taken another £8 or £9 a week off us for rent. We do not know how we are going to pay our way, but, honestly, what are we going to do when we have all that poll tax to find?"

I readily concede that, in some cases, pensioners' worry and concern are not justified. I tell them that the poll tax is not coming in until 1990, but old people are old people. I tell the Government, whether or not they listen, that pensioners are desperately worried and upset about what has gone on in the last few days in respect of social security changes. Pensioners see the poll tax as yet another burden that they will have to carry. I tell the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) that if I had anything to do with the Government I would explain to pensioners where they stood and what the future held for them, because they are desperately worried about the situation facing them.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Pensioners know that not all of them suffer in quite the same way. My hon. Friend will know that the Prime Minister and her husband, who are pensioners, live in my borough. These two pensioners are in the 5 per cent. who will gain under the poll tax, while 90 per cent. of Southwark households will lose. Many pensioners have nothing and do not have to pay at the moment because they do not have the money. They will be asked to pay a poll tax, but the Prime Minister and her husband will have their rates reduced by nearly £2,000. Does my hon. Friend tell his pensioners that, and what would their response be to that fair system of local government finance?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. I do not need to tell the pensioners that, because most of them know already. When I talk to pensioners, I do not try to inflame them. I try to calm them down and stop their worry. I explain that the poll tax is three years away. However, they are upset and worried. They are worried because it is a rotten tax. It is an ill-conceived tax. The new clause does not make it a good tax, but it makes it less rotten. That is why I and my hon. Friends will support the new clause this evening.

There are many criticisms of the poll tax. I shall not rehearse them all now, because it would not be proper in this debate. However, it will weaken local government and create an army of bureaucrats and snoopers, and it will certainly be more expensive to collect. Above all, it is a compulsory tax that bears no relation to ability to pay. That is why the new clause is an improvement. It at least makes some attempt, however crude, to relate the levy to ability to pay. The concessions announced last week do not answer the fundamental weakness in the basic proposals.

Rebates imply, rightly or wrongly, that one has to pay first and receive a rebate afterwards. That needs to be cleared up. In any case, if rebates are to be based on national average taxes, as I understand they are, that will certainly penalise the north as against the south. It will penalise the north for a simple reason. Many of the problems that have to be faced by local government in this country—I am thinking particularly of problems with housing and social services—are more apparent in the north than in the south, if only for reasons of history.

Mr. Howard: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: I shall give way in a moment. The Minister can be working out what he wants to say.

The cost of social services and housing will inevitably be higher in the north than in the south. In any case, if one talks about an average rate of rebate in relation to the poll tax it must imply that some authorities will levy a higher rate than others. Because of social conditions in the north —I am not referring to loony councils; I concede that they exist and I do not defend them—the higher rate of tax will often be in the north. If one refunds only the average level of tax, that means that people in the north will receive less rebate as a percentage of what they pay.

Mr. Howard: I had hoped to save the hon. Gentleman a bit of time. Will he accept that the rebates will be based, not on the average community charge, but on the community charge levied in each area?

Mr. Smith: I am grateful to the Minister for that information. I mean that sincerely. I was not aware of that and I am delighted to hear it.

As I was saying, there are loony councils——

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the statement by the Secretary of State that the system of rebates is designed to help the poorest is the same as the statement that was made when housing benefit was introduced? However, this month we

have found that millions of people are losing because of changes in the benefits system. What guarantee is there that there will not be changes in the rebate system?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman has made a valid point. Perhaps the Minister should take that on board when somebody challenges the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) about what would happen if the band of tax changed or the Government changed. It is equally applicable to concessions.

I am glad to say that the official Opposition are supporting the new clause, as we are. There was a time when the Leader of the Opposition announced that they were not going to support the new clause. I can understand that point of view. Let me be frank. If we were speaking in terms of pure party political strategy, we would be daft to support the new clause. The new clause will help to get the Government off the hook on the matter of the poll tax. Many of us in one sense, not a caring sense but a party political sense, will not be upset if the poll tax is carried, because it will do the Government a lot of harm and it will do other parties a lot of good. Therefore, as I have said, I can understand the view of the Leader of the Opposition. Ultimately, he came to the opinion, as he often does, where he said, "I am their leader; I must follow them."

6.45 pm

Mr. Tony Banks: At least we know who is the leader of the party.

Mr. Smith: I am sure that the House will be glad to know that for this short spell, today's debate, I am acting as the leader of my hon. Friends.

I find it difficult to believe that this Government, or any Government, can seriously set out to attack those least able to defend themselves. That is what the Bill is doing. It attacks the pensioners, the sick and the disabled. As I said to the right hon. Member for Chingford, I can conclude only that the Government have become power-drunk. They have had eight or nine years with a substantial majority and they have lost no major decisions in the House over that time. There comes a time in politics, or anything else, when Governments think that they cannot lose and that they can get away with anything. If the new clause were to be carried tonight, it would do the Government a service in terms of political appeal. It would do them good, in that it would say, "Hang on. We will put up with just so much and no more. You have gone too far on this matter."

My party has always made it clear that it favours a local income tax. We believe that that is a fairer system because it works on the basis of from each according to his ability to pay. New clause 7, which is being considered with this new clause, makes that point. We have published detailed proposals on how that would be implemented and we would be glad to send a copy to any right hon. or hon. Member. New clause 1 is a move towards the principle of relating local government taxation to income tax. That is why we shall support it.

We have been given by the Secretary of State a long list of reasons why the new clause will not work. I began to wonder whether the London marathon was finishing today or yesterday. I listened with great interest—well, I listened anyway—to what the Secretary of State said. With the exception of young members such as the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), who said that this was his first Parliament, we all know how to defeat a new clause. There are many hon. Members who have served in past Parliaments, and there are plenty of ex-Ministers on the Conservative Benches. They all know that all one has to say is that it is badly worded, would not work or that the civil servants have said it is clumsy and so on. We all know all that and we have heard it all before.

If the Government wanted to introduce a poll tax that was related to the ability to pay, they could do so, and they know it. What matters about the new clause is not what it recommends, but the principle that it establishes. That is the key issue on which we are being asked to vote tonight. It establishes the principle that any change in local government taxation should result in a system that bears some relation to the ratepayer's or taxpayer's ability to pay.

I commend the hon. Member for Hampshire, East for moving the new clause, and my colleagues and I will support it.

Mr. Tebbit: Listening to the debate, one feels a sense of déjà vu. If the words, "Greater London council" were substituted for "community charge", I seem to have heard all the same arguments being made by many of the same people.

The same degree of opportunism was being practised by the Labour party on that occasion as we have seen today. It is prepared to support a clause that it opposes merely to seek to cause further embarrassment to the Government. I do not blame it for doing that, and it is perfectly entitled to do so. However, that shows that the Labour party still has no policy of its own to stand by. At least the Liberal party has a policy to stand by that is totally impracticable, but the Labour party has not even an impractical policy.

I am an unrepentant supporter of the community charge, and have been ever since I invented it in the early 1970s. I recollect that I wrote a paper to the then Secretary of State for the Environment suggesting that the community charge was the right way forward for the reform of local government. I was then a young man and untutored politician, so I called it a poll tax; I had not thought of calling it a community charge.

I finished my paper by suggesting that if the system were in force no one would conceivably dream of proposing to change it for a system so arbitrary and unfair as the rating system. I added that I very much doubted whether any Government would bring forward the system because of the difficulties, anomalies and the cries of "It's not fair" based on the definition of my right hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery).

I was wrong about that. I must tell the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) that the Government are not power-drunk. We have a Government who have the courage to implement their manifesto. I realise that the hon. Member for Rochdale finds that objectionable because he did not like the manifesto and has never been a support of a Government that implemented their manifesto. However, he will have to put up with that.

Local government finance is a very difficult problem indeed. We do not have to pinch letters from the Labour party's headquarters to know that it opposes its own policies.

As usual, the debate is not about alternative policies being advanced by a would-be alternative Government, because the Labour party is not an alternative Government and does not have policies to put forward. As

[Mr. Tebbit]

so often happens, the debate is about various ways of modifying or changing to some extent the agreed policies of the Government and Conservative party. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) moved his new clause in the way that he did. He did so not in an arrogant or argumentative way, but in a thoughtful way, seeking to make his point in the best possible manner. It seems to me that he still has not quite accepted the basis of the community charge. He still has not accepted that it will account for only one quarter of local government finance, with the other three quarters being paid according to the ability to pay.

Of the one quarter that is represented by the community charge, the Government's assumption is that below a certain income level—that at which it is assumed full payment can be afforded—there will be increasing remission to a minimum payment of 15 per cent. We are saying that there is a level of income above which the elector should be able to afford to pay all the community charge.

I do not think that my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East has accepted that argument. He is saying that the community charge should be adjusted so that wealthier people pay more than their nominal share and so that nobody below a certain level pays as much as the full nominal share. I think that that is the wrong approach. We should accept that, whether it be a matter of food, clothing, a roof over one's head or the payment of local authority services, for those who cannot afford to pay there should be help so that they can pay, and that that help should be graduated. Once one gets over that level, there is no case for adding a further level of penal taxation, which is what my hon. Friend is proposing. I believe that that misunderstanding has caused him to move the new clause.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that, for someone who has a take-home pay of £53 per week, paying one tenth of that amount in poll tax is not a reasonable definition of ability to pay?

Mr. Tebbit: I make two points in response to the hon. Lady. First, she is coming towards my view in conceding that there is a level at which my argument is correct. She feels that the levels being proposed at present are too low. [HON. MEMBERS: "Give us the levels."] I think that, broadly, the Government have got it right. *[Interruption.]* We would get on much quicker if Opposition Members interrupted less. *[Interruption.]* I think that Opposition Members are making my point rather well.

According to the hon. Lady's argument, one must look not only at the income of the individual but at their needs and pattern of expenditure. We are talking about a single person who is not a householder, not paying rent and living in a home that is being provided, at least in part, by other people. He receives £53 net in take-home pay, and we are asking whether it is unreasonable that 10 per cent. of that amount should go towards the costs of providing local authority services which he enjoys and which are very much greater in value than that one tenth. We do not say that he should receive a subsidy for clothes, food or drink, so why do we say that he should receive a subsidy for the services that he receives from the local authority?

Mrs. Fyfe: The point that Opposition Members have been making is that we are talking about a tax, not the buying of goods. What proportion would an hon. Member or a Minister be paying of his take-home pay in poll tax and how would that compare to the rates that he is paying at present? We are talking about the ability to pay and a fair system that takes a proper proportion of a person's earnings. Labour Members do not consider it fair for someone to have to pay £5 out of a weekly income of £53.

Mr. Tebbit: I am glad that I have saved the hon. Lady the trouble of making her speech, but she makes the point perfectly. There are those of us who believe that the taxation element of local government is well provided for by the 75 per cent. of local government costs which are not paid by community charge and that there is an element of services which are rendered by local government which should be paid for according to the cost of the services rather than according to the income of those receiving them. The hon. Lady has rightly illuminated the major difference that splits the House and, to some extent, has illuminated the minor difference that splits my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East and myself.

7 pm

Misunderstanding of the nature of the community charge leads my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East to bring forward a new clause which patently will not work and will generally make matters worse. Unfortunately, he did not find time to deal with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) about the plight of a man and wife. The man may pay one and half times the community charge and his wife may be out at work. She may suddenly decide to stop work and have a child. She may have been paying community charge on the basis of one charge, but, now that she comes back home to have a child and is dependent upon her husband, she has to pay one and half community charges—according to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East—because she is taken to have the same financial circumstances as her husband.

That is not to nit-pick at new clause 1. It is to suggest that there is not a new clause of the kind which my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East seeks which could conceivably be designed and which is fairer than the present system. In the same way, my hon. Friend has no defence against the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Pavilion—that the extra revenue which would flow from the 50 per cent. charges would flow overwhelmingly to the wealthy local authorities where wealthy people live, not to the poor local authorities where poor people live.

I think that the best course for my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East would be to accept that his new clause is misdirected. He is trying to achieve something through a system which will not allow it to be properly and effectively made. If my hon. Friend wants the system to work in a way that gives more help to the less well-off, the right way to go is along the lines which have been outlined by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the path which he has already taken. I very much hope that my hon. Friend and his supporters will withdraw the motion and support the Government.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): If the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) had listened to his hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr.

Mates), he would have heard him say that he was not targeting anything in the new clause towards the less well-off. The targeting is the well-off, those on £22,000 a year. The hon. Member for Hampshire, East made a brave speech, trying to put balance into a Bill that hon. Members think is very unbalanced. Despite the 16 interventions in the hon. Gentleman's speech—15 of which disagreed with the new clause—he made a good speech.

Mr. Devlin: Would it be right to say that all the interventions in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) came from Conservative Members and not one came from the Opposition? At that time, only 78 Opposition Members were present and there are now only 36. If the Labour party is so virulently against this tax, why is there not better attendance, while the Conservative Benches continue to be full?

Mr. Barron: The hon. Gentleman will find out in the Division Lobbies at 10 o'clock why no Opposition Member opposed the new clause.

The Secretary of State made a somewhat rambling speech. In Committee, more that 200 Government amendments were tabled. For this five-day debate another 139 Government amendments have been tabled. But the Secretary of State said something that left me with a smile on my face. He believed that the way to a fairer distribution of wealth was to have a flat-rate tax, as proposed in the Bill, and use the income tax system. On 15 March, 750,000 people were given a tax rebate worth £2 billion a year, so the Secretary of State must have made today's comments somewhat tongue in cheek. Only the Opposition have talked about what really matters—exactly how the ability to pay will operate. The new clause attempts to deal with this aspect, which will affect not Members of the House of Commons—none of us will be affected—but the country in general.

Unlike the right hon. Member for Chingford, I cannot say that the words "Greater London council" can be replaced with "community charge". The right hon. Gentleman aspires to be leader of a political party that could win office, but he will never be a leader unless he knows the effect of legislation where it matters, in the constituencies. We have been worried about the Bill for a long time in terms of its effect on the community.

I am concerned about the regional effect of a flat-rate tax in terms of ability to pay. In Yorkshire and Humberside—the area of my constituency—household income is 73 per cent. of the income of those in the south-east. Effectively, this means that 70 per cent. of households in Yorkshire and Humberside will lose under this new tax and 71 per cent. in the south-east will gain. The right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) is on record as calling this a Tory tax. It is a pay-off for people who voted Conservative and it attacks people who have not returned Conservative Members.

Using the Government's formula and the 1987-88 rates, the local authority calculation is that the average rates increase throughout the Rotherham metropolitan borough will be 32·2 per cent. There are 20 villages in my constituency which have 30 houses or more. Only five villages will be gainers under this legislation and 15 will be losers. The average rates increase throughout my constituency will be more than 50 per cent. I shall show two extremes in Rother Valley. There is the village of Catcliffe, which has old railway back-to-back terrace housing near the former Tinsley railway yards. The increase in domestic rates will be 73 per cent. In the village of Letwell, which has about two dozen big houses, the rates will decrease by 19·8 per cent.

Small terraced houses have been referred to. I live in a village called Maltby, where at present the average increase based on average rates is 42 per cent. A couple living in a small private terraced house in my constituency will face an increase of about 220 per cent., on 1987-88 figures, when the poll tax is imposed in Rotherham. A couple living in a house with a rateable value of £55 now pay £157 in rates. Under the poll tax, they will pay £504—an increase of £346.

Even given the rebate system in the Bill, we are still left with a £53 trigger; above that figure, a single person in my constituency will pay the full rate of poll tax—the same as the millionaire, and there are not many of them in my constituency. A couple with £140 a week earned income will have to pay the full amount. There will be no rebate for them. The increases are excessive and many households will simply not be able to take them.

It is predicted that if the community charge is introduced in Rotherham borough, the spending power of residents over the age of 18 will be reduced by about £12 million. The position would be made worse by the fact that the areas of Rotherham facing the largest increases would be those where the propensity to consume is the highest, and those who benefit from the introduction of the community charge may convert into savings the reduced call on their incomes. It is clear that the biggest losers would be those living in the areas of poorest housing. Consequently, it would be almost inevitable that the gap between the poor and the better-off would grow.

The borough council estimates that the cost of collection will increase from the £1·3 million that it now costs to collect the rates to about £2·9 million—an increase of £1·6 million. My area is impoverished. That money should be spent not on collecting the poll tax but on trying to raise the community above its present level of poverty. I see nothing in the legislation—I include the uniform business rate—that would help. *[Interruption]* The amendment is about the ability to pay. I am trying to educate hon. Members, if they will only keep quiet.

I have in front of me a brief sent to hon. Members today by Age Concern, which is extremely worried about the effects that the poll tax will have on care in the community. It says:

> "The imposition of the . . . charge will erect further barriers to care in the community. People in residential and nursing homes . . . will be exempt from the charge; but those moving in and out of care, or moving into sheltered accommodation, will be liable. Furthermore, households in which an elderly person is cared for by relatives or friends living under the same roof will be penalised by the community charge."

I understand the implications of the community charge for families that include young people. The head of an impoverished household may feel that a youngster of 17½ is a threat to that household's income because he is approaching the age at which he is liable to pay some or all of the tax. The Government say that people should come out of care and into the community, and to attack households caring for young people in that way is quite wrong.

[Mr. Barron]

Imperfect though the new clause may be, I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will support it to try to bring some sense into the Bill before it damages not only my community but many hundreds of others.

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): It is no secret that the last time the House discussed the Bill, in December last year, a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends were thinking of voting against it or abstaining, but voted for it at the end of the day. There are three reasons why those who had reservations then should support the new clause.

First, last December my hon. Friends and I were asking hon. Members to vote against the Second Reading of the Bill. Had we succeeded, the flagship would indeed have sunk. Tonight, we are asking them, not to vote against the Second Reading and thus to sink the flagship, but merely to adjust the direction in which it is sailing. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) described the new clause as "a minor difference." It would be wholly consistent for those who supported the Bill on Second Reading, but with reservations, to vote for the new clause.

Secondly, a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends voted for the Bill on Second Reading in the belief, hope or expectation that it might be amended in Standing Committee to take account of ability to pay. Attempts to do that in Committee were not successful. If my hon. Friends now want to inject ability to pay into the Bill, they have to vote for the new clause.

7.15 pm

Thirdly—and this is the more powerful reason—we are now better placed to consider the measure in the context of the Government's programme of economic and social reform. The fiscal framework for this Parliament is now clearer as a result of the Budget, and the social security framework is clearer following the implementation this month of new measures. Although it may be inconvenient for local government Ministers, one simply cannot isolate this Bill from other legislation in assessing the impact of the Government's actions on living standards and disposable income for various sections of the community —in particular that section of the community whose incomes are just above benefit level.

Most Conservative Members have no difficulty at all in defending the Budget. The economy is performing better. Revenues are higher than budgeted for and there is evidence of a virtuous circle. Furthermore, all taxpayers benefit from the Budget. Likewise, the vast majority of us can back the social security reforms—particularly given the extra expenditure and the Government's undertaking to monitor the arrangements closely and, it is to be hoped, protect any casualties. While the Bishop of Durham and our political opponents may find it convenient to juxtapose the two reforms, it is perfectly possible to defend each of them intellectually.

However, without the new clause, the Bill commits the very crime of which our opponents accuse us, and we have no alibi. The Bill transfers resources from the poor to the rich, and does so in a highly visible and undeniable way. In two years' time the community charge will reduce the taxes paid by the better-off because the rateable value of their houses, which is above average, will tend to disappear from the equation. Under the Bill we shall reduce the taxes paid by the better-off not by reducing taxation or public expenditure generally, as happened in the Budget, but by shifting the burden on to the shoulders of the less well-off. Likewise, under the Bill as drafted, the nearly poor will pay more, not, as under the social security reforms, to help the very poor, but to help the better-off.

Against the background of the Government's social and economic changes, it is wholly alien to our party's philosophy to introduce a taxation measure that pushes the burden on to the shoulders of the poor and the less well-off. The Bill will have a particular impact on one group of the population—those who are not well enough off to benefit from the Budget changes but who are not poor enough to get help from social security. This group includes those disadvantaged by the capital cut-off, by charges and perhaps by higher rents introduced by the new rent regime. This measure will disadvantage a vulnerable group of the population.

Mr. Leigh: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir George Young: In deference to the large number of hon. Members who wish to speak, I shall give way only once. Who better than my hon. Friend?

Mr. Leigh: Will my hon. Friend address the point made by the Secretary of State in his opening speech? He said that if the new clause was accepted it would raise £200 million at the cost of creating a significant earnings trap and that it would be easier to raise that extra money by increasing the higher rate of income tax.

Sir George Young: I shall come to that point in a minute. With a dismissive sweep of the arm, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that any attempt to raise local revenue by a form of local income tax was inherently impossible—ignoring the fact that that is exactly how the vast majority of civilised countries fund local government and that not one civilised country funds local government in the way proposed by the Bill.

New clause 2, which stands in my name, proposes a slightly more radical approach to the matter by abolishing the bureaucracy, intrusion and cost required by the community charge register. Instead, it suggests the use of the database of the Inland Revenue, which has the names and addresses of 30 million people. That seems to me to be quite a good starting point for any tax.

When we raised this matter in Committee, I was surprised at the weakness of the case against it, but the case has been greatly strengthened by the Budget decision to tax married women separately. This will broaden the base of any local banded tax or graduated income tax. I have no doubt that in time we will end up with something that is rather like new clause 2. However, new clause 1 is far easier to commend to my hon. Friends because it is much closer to the Government's proposals.

I shall now deal with the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh). He implied that there was some exciting discontinuity in my hon. Friend's proposals which constituted an earnings trap. In a rather extravagant article in a newspaper on Saturday, Woodrow Wyatt made exactly this point when he said:

> "Mr. Mates wants all those with a taxable income of £19,300 and above to suffer further massive redistribution by paying a community charge 50 per cent. more than anyone else. This is a higher earner disincentive trap."

We are talking about £100 for someone whose disposable income after mortgage interest tax relief, pension relief and

any other relief is about £20,000 a year. The discontinuity that ought to concern my hon. Friend is that of the national insurance scheme. When one's income rises from £38 to £40, one becomes exposed to 5 per cent. tax on the lot. Is my hon. Friend saying that £100 to someone on £23,000 a year is pernicious and an earnings trap, but that the same figure for someone earning £40 is quite acceptable?

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington) *rose——*

Sir George Young: No, I shall not give way, because I gave an undertaking that I would give way only once.

The British people instinctively recognise what is unjust. The community charge, or poll tax, has been extensively debated and discussed over the past year and, despite heroic attempts by the Front Bench, there is still a belief in the country that it is unjust. The concession made on Thursday does not address the heart of the problem. In a sense it makes the matter worse, because on Thursday the Government sawed away even further at the branch of accountability, on which they have been rather precariously perched, by reducing the number of people who pay the flat rate tax—which was the main argument for the scheme.

It would be far easier to present this policy to the country if new clause 1 were added to the Bill. It would take some of the rough edges off the proposals and enable us to defend the Bill by saying that we have attempted to link it to ability to pay. I urge those of my hon. Friends who believe that the policy as it stands is damaging to the party, and at variance with our tradition, to support my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) in the Division Lobby.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Anyone listening to the debate would think that the community charge was to be introduced in 1990, but we know that in Scotland it will be introduced next year. We also know that the whole process of administering the charge is being brought into force in Scotland. In his interesting speech, the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) gave himself, perhaps quite rightly, some backhanded compliments on winning elections. The community charge or poll tax was the Conservative flagship in the election in Scotland as well, and look what happened there. To look at that is to deal in much more up-to-date terms with the actuality of what can happen.

I say to all hon. Members but especially to Conservative Members that if we were being politically devious we would let this tax pass because nothing is more likely to ensure a comprehensive Labour victory in the next general election. I speak from experience. The Opposition do not need to tell lies about this legislation but just have to tell the truth about what is happening. We do not have to manufacture any phraseology about it but need use only the words that the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for the Environment have used.

I should like to quote from a speech by the Secretary of State for the Environment on 19 March:

> "Therefore, it must be right for all the people to pay a charge for local services, just as all the people can vote for them."

Of course, on the basis of his own argument that is not true. He went on to say:

> "That is what we mean by accountability."

I should also like to quote from a pamphlet written by the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) in 1985. The hon. Member has gained some reputation as being the architect of the poll tax. He said:

> "To exempt people from liability to pay the poll tax, or to pay it for them through the social security system or via some scheme of rebates, would be to destroy accountability."

That point has been made before in another context. The minute one tries to ameliorate the impact of this tax one moves away from accountability.

In his speech on 19 March, the Secretary of State, no doubt anticipating some of the arguments to be made by the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates), said:

> "There is now general acceptance that rates must go, and be replaced by a charge on people, as opposed to property. But there are critics who say that the Community Charge does not reflect ability to pay. They are wrong, and we are winning that argument too."

How were the Government winning the argument on 19 March when they had to make concessions a few days ago? Was the argument so overwhelmingly won by the speeches of Ministers that they could afford to make the sort of concession that they did make, which is only a palliative?

The tax affronts the basic tenets and canons of taxation that people of all parties have accepted. Some hon. Members misquote and misdirect the words of Adam Smith. The first canon of taxation that he enunciated was related to the ability to pay. That was a measure of a tax's efficacy.

We know that the poll tax offends against that because the Secretary of State and others do not want a tax that is related to ability to pay. They want a penal tax. They argue that we should clearly identify what they choose to call large spending local authorities, profligate local authorities. They want to show the community charge, the poll tax, in national terms and to ask people to look at local authority bills and try to equalise the national impact of the tax. This will not work if local authority services are to remain local.

I return to what is happening in Scotland. I agree with the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) that those of us who conduct what we euphemistically call surgeries meet people who say that they will not be able to pay the tax. It is not that they want to break the law, but that they cannot pay the tax. In Scotland those people will be faced either with the poinding of their furniture through warrant sales or by arrestment of wages. That is what will happen, and we know that because of pressures on people from other Government legislation. Perhaps local authorities in Scotland will ameliorate some of the difficulties that those people face, but is it really the sort of tax that we want to introduce in 1989?

I predict—I say this especially for the right hon. Member for Chingford—that if we tell the truth about the poll tax during the coming elections in Scotland, the Tory party may well be eliminated from every council. Of course, I would not weep about that. The tax is repugnant because of its basic unfairness. Any defence of it is based either on the desire to control so-called profligate local authorities or the desire to enforce accountability—but there is no defence on the ground of fairness.

I do not want to disobey the laws to which I am a party, one step removed, in this House. However, we must unite those who cannot pay the tax because of a lack of resources and those who will not pay it because of conscience.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): When the hon. Gentleman faces the Scottish electorate in the May local elections, will he put forward his party's alternative either to the community charge or to the current system?

7.30 pm

Mr. Douglas: I find myself in enough difficulty speaking for myself, let alone for the Labour party. I agree with the view taken by Layfield, who was rather fulsome about a local income tax. Paragraph 105 of his report states:

"The present structure of local government is a further complication. Generally LIT"—

that is, local income tax—

"could not be introduced at the level of districts. However, we consider it would be feasible to operate LIT for each of the Scottish regions and islands."

Therefore, there is some feasibility in a local income tax, but I should prefer to retain some form of property tax.

I repeat that in Scotland we must unite those who will not pay on grounds of conscience and those who cannot pay because they do not have the resources. Such a stance may or may not prove popular. Generally speaking, we are a law-abiding party and a law-abiding people, but there is no shame—*[Interruption.]* The House has its last chance tonight to recognise what it did not recognise in the Scottish legislation.

I have a great deal of respect for the hon. Member for Hampshire, East and other hon. Members who have had second thoughts—even though I may not agree with them. Unless we decide otherwise tonight, the poll tax will be in place in Scotland within a year—[HON. MEMBERS: "Good".] If hon. Members say, "Good," they are actually saying that Scotland should be used as a guinea pig for the rest of the nation. I cannot accept that.

Those hon. Members who are supposed to be interested in the Union—more Conservative Members than Opposition Members feel such an obligation—must take care how they vote tonight because it will be a signal to the people of Scotland on how we should proceed constitutionally in this House.

Mr. John M. Taylor (Solihull): It is sad to follow an honourable legislator who concluded his remarks with an invitation to his fellow citizens to disobey the law. If we are not here in good faith as legislators, determined to live with the end product and to work for it or against it politically, we have no business to be here at all.

I shall be brief because I spoke on Second Reading and I have not changed my mind on any particular. There are taxes in society that are ad valorem or that are related to the ability to pay—for example, corporation tax, capital gains tax, taxes on benefits in kind, stamp duty and special car tax. Above all, income tax is not merely related to the ability to pay, but is a direct tax on the ability to pay.

All civilised societies should have such a tax, but that does not mean that all taxes should take the same form. We all pay the same for many goods and services, and there is an inherent fairness in that on the basis that equity is equality. There cannot be a more egalitarian regime than everyone paying the same. However, the community charge is not an exact egality because the poorer and most hard-pressed members of society will have rebates of up to 80 per cent. That is the essential derogation from the principle of everyone paying the same.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The Secretary of State has confirmed that a multi-millionaire in any given area will pay precisely the same as a pensioner in that area who has only a small income but has more than £6,000 capital. Does the hon. Gentleman think that to be fair?

Mr. Taylor: The pensioner would pay the same as the multi-millionaire for a loaf of bread or a gallon of petrol. The richer man makes his heavier contribution to society through the other taxes that I mentioned. The hon. Gentleman well knows that a rich man travelling on a bus pays the same fare as other people, including the pensioner unless that pensioner has a bus pass.

Mr. Tebbit: Has my hon. Friend noticed the Opposition's assumption that the current rating system is fair? They assume that a schoolteacher in my constituency, who is paid not very much more than a schoolteacher in the north of England, should pay three or four times as much in rates simply for the privilege of living in my constituency. While we all accept that that is a very great privilege, it is overdoing it a little.

Mr. Taylor: My right hon. Friend is correct. There has been a deafening silence from the Opposition on any alternative.

The poll tax will be levied to pay for local government services in general. For local authority services in particular—for example, the use of swimming baths, the removal of garden refuse, application for planning permission, and so on—we all pay the same. For services that have a specific charge, the rich and the poor pay the same, with the exception of certain derogations available to the poor. If it is right to pay the same for specificially provided municipal services, why is it wrong to charge for them generically and generally? We have enough income tax in this country. Even the enlightened Labour Administrations in New Zealand and Australia have seen the necessity to pull down income tax if they want vigorous economies. Quite rightly, this Government have pulled down rates of income tax. I do not want any more income tax through the back door, by having a banding on local revenues.

Mr. Cormack: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Taylor: I have given way twice. I am anxious to proceed. I do not wish to offend my hon. Friend. I shall give way if his remarks will be brief.

Mr. Cormack: My remarks will be brief. Would my hon. Friend have advocated people paying at the same rate, irrespective of the quality and location of the house in which they live?

Mr. Taylor: People who live in different quality houses take the same bus from the same bus stop and pay the same bus fares. That would seem to be an illustration of the proposition upon which I have been asked to comment.

All hon. Members who have contributed to the debate so far, particularly those with some predisposition to the new clause, have assumed that, at any given time, any given individual knows his tax band. Frankly, that is not true. It is certainly not true for the self-employed or for schedule D taxpayers, who are taxed on a preceding year basis. Alternatively, if that is not a problem in itself, during the year they may receive an accrual that will alter their tax band and will certainly affect their tax payments in the following year. Many people on schedule D do not know

their tax band to within two years, nor are they being obscure in that regard. The Inland Revenue does not know it either, so there is no point in asking.

I shall vote against the new clause. I have been in favour of a poll tax since 1977. I shall vote for the poll tax, even though it is called a community charge.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): New clause 1 is about people's ability to pay. Although there are anomalies within the clause, "owt is better than nowt". It is certainly better than what the Secretary of State is proposing. Conservative Members would do well to come down from their ivory tower to the world of reality, as the world of reality has poverty and despair. A classic example involves two Conservative Members who, for one week, attempted to live on the dole and, of course, ended up in debt. There is not enough reality among Conservative Members. That demonstrates why many Conservative Members are quite willing to sacrifice the poor of this country on the altar of greed and selfishness.

My constituency is within the Doncaster metropolitan borough area. Doncaster is a mixed area of pit villages, agriculture and industry. Property in Doncaster is reasonably priced—so much so that, with the east coast line electrification, London commuters will save thousands of pounds when they buy houses in Doncaster. Because house prices have historically been low, the rateable value of property in Doncaster is also low. The impact of the poll tax on the population of Doncaster will be devastating.

Based on figures produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, in 1988 expenditure terms, the equivalent poll tax will be about £300 per person. A person living in a house with a rateable value of less than £100 will be worse off under the poll tax. Twenty-five per cent. of homes in Doncaster have a rateable value of £100 or less. A couple will be worse off if the rateable value of their home is less than £200. Ninety per cent. of homes in Doncaster have a rateable value of £200 or less. A family of three will be worse off if the rateable value of their home is less than £300.

A family of four adults living in Mexborough, recently named by a university study group as the poorest town in England, pay £160 in rates per year. Their poll tax will be £1,200. Hon. Members should contrast that with a person living in a village a few miles away and currently paying £3,800 a year in rates. If he lives alone, he will pay just £300 in poll tax. How does that help the elderly widow who is currently paying the same as the household with four adults? She will pay the same as the person in the mansion up the road.

7.45 pm

The Government claim that many individuals will benefit from the poll tax. There may be hurricanes in Hampshire, Hertfordshire and Huntingdon, but in Doncaster, Barnsley and Rotherham there will be a tidal wave of poverty as a result of the tax. It is a tax on the family. The tragedy is that when the Prime Minister came to power she talked about the need to maintain family unity. The thrust of the Government's legislation has been to drive families apart. On the one hand, the social security and housing benefit changes virtually force young adults live at home. On the other hand, if young adults live at home, their families will pay more in tax.

Families in my constituency are close-knit. That is to be expected in the north. Many young people do not leave home until they are married, and some even stay on afterwards. How many parents will stand by and see bailiffs take their children's belongings because they cannot pay their poll tax? Very few in my constituency will do that. The family will stick together and pay for all its members.

Whether there is a rebate scheme or a banded tax, the vast majority of my constituents will lose under the poll tax. It is not just a flat-rate poll tax that will cause that state of affairs. The redistribution of resources between regions will have a most profound effect. How can it be fair and reasonable for Yorkshire and Humberside to lose resources, while the south-east of England outside London gains resources?

At the moment Doncaster receives grant, which partly makes up for its low rateable resources. The proposed grant system will take no account of resources, only needs, based on a comparison with a district in Surrey. The people of Doncaster will have to make up that loss out of their poll tax payments.

The administration of the new system will cause costs to rise. Currently, Doncaster council sends out 80,000 rate bills, and the 35,000 council tenants pay their rates with their rent. If the Bill becomes law, in April 1989 the council will send out 110,000 canvass forms. When an entry is made in the poll tax register, over 200,000 notifications will have to be sent out. In April 1990, over 200,000 bills will be sent out. The cost of administering the charge will be wholly met by poll tax payers. The local council will keep track of the population over 18 years of age and, each year, will have to estimate what population movements will take place.

At present, 18 per cent. of properties change hands each year, but up to 30 per cent. of people move in and out of property. How can the council keep track of such movements without large staff numbers and frequent visits to people's homes? The poll tax will be ripe for people to avoid paying it.

A recent survey found that one person in 10 said that they would rather not vote than pay the poll tax. These are normal, honest people. If the trend were to be repeated around the country, 90 per cent. of those on the register would have to pay an extra 20 per cent. the following year to make up the shortfall and satisfy the council's need for that year. This will be a problem facing all councils and every individual in the council area. The answer is either for the council to employ more staff, or for all population movement to be monitored in some way, and of course that has implications for civil liberties.

The poll tax is a bad tax. It fails the test of a good tax. It is regressive and does not take into account the ability to pay, even with a rebate scheme. It is open to avoidance and abuse. It may work in Japan, but there it is only a tiny element in a huge local tax system. In Britain it will not work, as no doubt our friends in Scotland will demonstrate. If the Government are so convinced that the country wants this poll tax, why do they not have a national referendum on it?

Mr. Onslow: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am particularly grateful to you——

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The right hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Onslow) has spoken in the debate and sat down. He cannot be called twice.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I shall not penalise the right hon. Gentleman for a genuine mistake which I made in the Chair.

Mr. Onslow: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker for responding in that way to that rather churlish intervention from the Opposition Front Bench. I recognise that I am fortunate in catching your eye now because one does not often get two bites of the cherry in this House. I shall not trespass on your generosity, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by making a long speech, but my anxiety to intervene now rather than sooner was prompted by a desire to listen to what was being said and not to take up time in debate.

Having listened to the debate, I must say at once that we have been discussing quite a complex subject and it is a great pity that much of it could not have been discussed in Committee. However, I understand how these things happen and obviously, that was not possible on this occasion. It is also clear that the new clause that we are discussing has nothing especially to do with the principle of the community charge as such.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) made a very able speech in introducing his new clause and went out of his way to emphasise that he was 90 per cent. in favour of what the Government were trying to do. I understand that to be support for the community charge with a reservation of 10 per cent. If I am wrong, no doubt I will be corrected.

The discussion and the thinking behind the new clause are prompted by a difference in the perception of equity in the treatment of higher-earning local residents under the proposed system of community charges. Again, I did not detect that my hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State differed significantly about the impact that the proposed arrangements would have on those who are at the lowest end of the earnings scale or those who have no significant earnings at all.

I do not think that we are talking about that. We are talking about a fairly narrow point affecting 9 per cent. of the potential payers of the community charge up and down the country. That is because some people see a problem with the proposals which the Government have brought forward, in that they do not seem to be fair and in line with what was promised in our manifesto. I confess that, if such a problem exists, my hon. Friend has brought forward what the scientists call "quite a neat solution" to it at first sight. However, I say that the more closely we look at it, the less neat it seems to be. Indeed, I am not sure that I accept that the problem exists at all.

We were talking in our manifesto about introducing a fairer system, and practically everybody reading those words would have understood them to mean "a fairer system than the rates", which we all agree are unfair. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East agrees that the rates are an unfair system. By posing the manifesto test, I do not think that the case stands up any more than it can be said that the words in our manifesto committed the Conservative party to the introduction of an income-linked scheme.

The possibility of a local income tax was repeatedly and specifically excluded during the long-drawn-out election campaign. I believe that most of my hon. Friends understood that. When there were references to an ability to pay, they were in the context that, if there are people who have genuine difficulty in paying, that difficulty will be recognised and taken care of in the scheme. That was precisely the point to which those words went, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) and my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) have pointed out.

I ask my my hon. Friend what he thinks will happen if his new clause is passed, if anyone should go into the Lobby with him to vote for it. The Opposition Front Bench gave its game away fairly clearly—and not very surprisingly—by making it clear that it stands for higher charges for people with higher earnings. Broadly speaking, that is what Socialism is about, and I was not surprised that they were so frank about it. I was also not very surprised to hear that, broadly speaking, the Socialist party is in favour of greater complexity and bureaucracy in the affairs of local government, which will mean more employeees for NALGO. It is in favour of greater intrusion into people's private affairs, including their tax affairs.

Anyone who has listened to the debate, as I did, must have realised that the scheme proposed by my hon. Friend would not work and could not work unless each signatory to the questionnaire dealing with the community charge was obliged to subscribe his tax reference number as well as his address. Without that tax reference number, there would be no way of telling in Wales which John Jones was which, and in England which John Smith was which.

My hon. Friend should not have dismissed as lightly as he did the clear statement by my right hon. Friend that that information would have to be available to local authorities, and would no doubt be used by local authorities of a Socialist frame of mind in ways which would not be welcomed by my hon. Friends at all. I doubt also whether any of our supporters would welcome it.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Onslow: No.

Mr Dalyell: Would the right hon. Gentleman allow me——

Mr. Onslow: No. I am going to be brief. It is sometimes necessary to raise one's voice to the hon. Gentleman to make him understand.

I also understand why the Scottish Labour MPs, to whom I am about to turn, should be tempted to vote for my hon. Friend's amendment. It was made clear by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), who is not with us at the moment, that he was anxious to incite civil disobedience. The passing of this amendment would create even more opportunities and excuses for him and his hon. Friends to do just that. There is no doubt that there will be great confusion, if not chaos, in local government in Scotland if the amendment were to be passed.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Onslow: No.

I turn now to a third group who I understand are likely to support the amendment, although I do not think that

there are any of them here at the moment. I well understand why some Northern Ireland hon. Members might seize this opportunity for what would seem to them to be a logical protest against the Anglo-Irish Agreement by voting in favour of my hon. Friend's amendment, even though they know, as I do, that the hon. Gentleman is one of the strongest and stoutest supporters of that Agreement. To the hon. Members from Northern Ireland, that may appear to be a logical, natural and respectable thing to do. However, my hon. Friend should be careful in the supporters whom he attracts to his corner.

I can understand all those things. I understand the less than reputable motives which may lead the various groups I have mentioned to vote in favour of the new clause. However, I do not understand why my hon. Friend should seek to press it to a Division.

In his response to the new clause, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it perfectly clear that if one is seeking equity in a fiscal system, that is already embodied in our taxation system, under which, the more one earns, the more one becomes liable to pay. As my right hon. Friend said, it follows from that that the more that local goverment expenditure is funded from the Exchequer, the fairer the overall effect. There is absolutely no gainsaying that.

8 pm

My hon. Friend's proposal is an insignificant and minor search for equity, which could be achieved in a much more significant and dramatic way by the transfer of a greater share of local government funding from local residents to the taxpayer at large. I do not understand why my hon. Friend is distracting his many colleagues, who would like that objective to be achieved, by leading them down a path where, for insignificant consequences, enormous damage may be done.

If my hon. Friend wants the principle of ability to pay to be enshrined in the system of local government finance, he and his friends should use the next two to three years to press more and more for the transfer of the funding base to the Exchequer and to taxpayers as a whole. They should not look in the direction to which they seem so attracted this evening.

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): This has been an interesting debate, in which we have heard some interesting arguments from Conservative Members. I was interested to hear the right hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Onslow) argue about the problems of privacy in new clause 1. He seems to have forgotten the base on which the rebates will be assessed. People will have to declare an income to get a rebate. It seems rather peculiar that we are again hearing the argument that it is all right for those at the lower end of the income scale to have their income exposed and to have no privacy, but that we cannot have that for people at the top end. Those inconsistencies and that division seem perfectly acceptable to some Conservative Members and are at the heart of much of our opposition to the fundamental abandonment of any idea that taxation should be based on the ability to pay.

I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) is not in his place. I should have liked him to be here so that I could say a little more about him, but never mind; I shall obey the conventions of the House and confine my remarks to what he said. He talked about the community charge as if it were not a tax and as if one should pay, not according ability to pay, but because one receives services. Therefore, one would be paying for the services. That is a remarkable argument, which, in a sense, expresses the poverty of the Government's morality.

As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not use the school services of my local education authority. I have no need to use them, nor will I use them, because I do not have any children. However, I do not say that therefore I do not have a responsibility to pay for those services, because I believe that I do have a responsibility and I want to have that responsibility. I believe that local and other services are part of the way in which we, as a civilised society, have decided that we shall organise our society. Tnerefore, it is my responsibility to contribute to the community and to do so according to my ability to pay, not according to the extent to which I use the services. The arguments of Conservative Members have been based on the extent to which we use the services. I reject that completely. I hope that the House will say that we want to develop a community and that we recognise that all must contribute to that community.

The real problem is that the Government see many of the people of this country as mean, selfish and not prepared to contribute to their communities, and prepared to pay only for what they get. That is an indictment of the Government. The British people are not like that. If the Government began to treat the British people with a bit of respect, that would enable the people to feel that they were part of a united country and the Government might get a better response from them—*[Interruption.]* It was interesting that the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) who is now making from a sedentary position——

Mr. Devlin: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Armstrong: No, I am responding to what the hon. Gentleman said earlier. He asked why, if the Opposition are really bothered, we are opposing the Bill, because if it is going to be so bad for the Tory Government the electorate will recognise it. I find such arguments sad. I did not come into politics to make people suffer to prove a political point.

I hope that the Government will change their mind about the tax. I hope that they will base it on ability to pay. I say that not because I think that I will get electoral advantage out of it, but because I know the effect that the tax in its present form will have on the people whom I have been sent here to represent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) made a general point about the north-south divide. It is a tragedy that the Government talk about the need for economic recovery, but are introducing yet another way of penalising the north for the benefit of the south, because money will flow from the north to the south. In the context of the general economic debates that we are having in the Chamber at the moment, that is crazy. It will make communities sueh as mine much less able to be independent and self-sufficient and less able to pay their proper contributions to the country.

Mr. Hind *rose*——

Ms. Armstrong: No, I shall not give way.

I want to speak about one group that has not been mentioned and about people who will be some of the greatest losers—women. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Conservative Members might find this difficult, but the

[Ms. Armstrong]

reality is that 77 per cent. of those who are judged as being in poverty among those of pensionable age are women. It is a fact that the majority of people who are carers in our society—people who are at home, looking after elderly or disabled relatives—are women. I have a high preponderance of them in my constituency, partly because my constituency has particular health problems because of the nature of its industry, but also because there is still strong family loyalty in my constituency. Women see it as their responsibility to keep their relatives at home for as long as possible. At the moment those relatives are not liable to pay rates, and many people get rate rebates, but that will not be so under the system that the Government are proposing.

The lunacy of that system is that it will encourage such families to say that they cannot cope any longer and that they will have to ask their mother or disabled relative to be taken into care.

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Armstrong: I am sorry, but I shall not give way. I have been asked to be brief.

Until now, single parents and carers have been eligible for rate rebates.

Mr. Butterfill: That is not true.

Ms. Armstrong: I can take the hon. Gentleman to visit dozens of people in my constituency for whom that is true. Perhaps he would like to meet some of them. Many women in my constituency do not work, again because of the traditional nature of the industry there. They will now have to pay the tax, despite having no income, so I plead with the Government to reconsider that. If they want to say that they believe in getting rid of the divisions in society and want to create a country where people can work together, they need to consider the particular needs of some groups whom I represent.

Whatever the electoral consequences, any Government should be anxious to win the support of all the people and not depend simply on the support of those who can afford to pay for their policies.

Mr. Michael Heseltine (Henley): I rise to support the new clause tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates). The whole House understands that this debate, which stretches back over a decade or so, can always be extended into a discussion about the options before us. That then provides an opportunity for avoiding a decision or for moving to a further stage in the legislation, at which point it becomes harder to change one's mind.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery) made a persuasive speech, and my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Onslow) put forward several suggestions. It was suggested that if we take some expenditure out of local authority budgets and transfer it to the centre, the community charge level can be containable, so the problem that we may have to address will be diminished. If colleagues seek to increase local authority expenditure and public expenditure, the way to do it is to shift more of the costs of various services from local authorities to the central Exchequer.

That is not a reflection on the Government. They will undoubtedly do all in their power to contain the budgets transferred to them from local authorities, but, as night follows day, as local authorities are relieved of whatever level of expenditure one transfers, they, faced with the choice of offering more services or reducing the level of rates or community charge, will spend more money on a wider range of services. Naturally, they will certainly make some reduction, but it will not be commensurate with the burden that central Government have assumed. Any of my right hon. and hon. Friends who believe that there is a way forward by switching resource expenditure to central Government are exciting the prospects for local authorities to exactly what we in this Government have spent 10 years trying to avoid—increasing the rate of public expenditure.

The whole House knows that I approach this as someone who, for better or worse, has been involved in the process that arose from the commitment——

Mr. Winnick: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: I know that the hon. Gentleman has an interesting set of points to make, but we cannot always give way, or not enough hon. Members will have a chance to make their speeches.

I was present at the shadow Cabinet meeting when it was originally decided that we should make a further commitment to the British people to replace the rates with a system that was fairer and reflected people's ability to pay. That was when the debate began and it has gone on since, both when we have been in opposition and in government. It fell to me, both in opposition and in government, to produce a solution that my colleagues in the shadow Cabinet or Cabinet believed met those two criteria. Perhaps it was my failure or lack of ingenuity, but, whatever the explanation, we could not find a system that met the criteria of fairness and people's ability to pay. For that reason, it was not difficult to persuade the shadow Cabinet in 1979 that as a priority we should reform rather than replace the rates. That did not seem to do our electoral prospects irreversible harm.

It fell to me as Secretary of State for the Environment to look into that in government, with all the help available for specialist and expert advisers and with all the advantages of a major Department of State, in a way in which the Opposition and, with respect to my hon. Friend, even Back-Bench Members cannot be expected to do. We published a Green Paper in 1981. I carefully listed the poll tax as one option, and without any shadow of doubt it is now a matter of recorded history that, faced with the arguments, there was hardly a debate. The Cabinet was not prepared to introduce what we then called a poll tax, because it was neither fair nor did it reflect people's ability to pay.

8.15 pm

Let us have no illusions about this. It was not until local authorities, largely under the control of the Labour party, sought to exploit the circumstances and to introduce an element of confrontation with the Government, quite out of keeping with the character of local government and its relationships with central Government, that this Government, understandably, were forced once again to raise the fundamental question of how we should replace rates, and to put that at the top of the political agenda.

The problem has been exposed time and again today: to bring some democratic pressure to bear on authorities with

the most extravagant expenditure policies, it was necessary to make their constituents feel the consequences of those high expenditure decisions by making them pay for those policies.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: No. The hon. Gentleman must forgive me.

The House will not question that the poll tax undoubtedly has that characteristic of accountability, which is why it was chosen as the way forward. Nobody chose it because it was a perfect system. No one claimed that it was a system without blemishes or disadvantages. Who would question its administrative complexity or the regressive nature that is inherent in that type of taxation? Certainly not the Government Front Bench, and rightly so. It unquestionably met the overriding political priority of forcing those who vote for high expenditure policies to feel the consequences of their actions, and that political objective has overridden all other political disadvantages which had previously proved decisive.

When the proposals were first announced, the idea was that the charge should be per head of the population and be met equally by all adult voters. That, at least in theory, would have brought to account high-spending local authorities. The problem is that, from the moment the proposals appeared, their unacceptably regressive nature forced concession after concession, to the point at which today we are left with few of the originally claimed advantages and all of the self-evident disadvantages.

I speak for a large number of my right hon. and hon. Friends and perhaps for some Opposition Members when I say that we welcomed the protection of the very poor that was inherent in the Government's pre-election rebate scheme. My right hon. Friend has gone further and he deserves praise for that. But the more concessions the Government make to protect the poor, the less effective the community charge becomes in meeting the priority of accountability.

As universal accountability diminishes, another more damaging divide emerges in its place. The further we move to protect those just below the poverty line, the more we promote a sense of grievance in those just above the poverty line. The childless couple will pay the full charge if their income is above £100 a week.

Many of my colleagues will recognise the similarity between that case and what has happened in the social security reorganisation, where those just above the poverty line with £10,000 in the bank are bewildered by the fact that the allowance has been changed to £6,000. It is precisely those people—who tend to live in less valuable homes, who have bought their homes and paid for them throughout their working lives and who, until now, have paid relatively low rates because their properties had a low rateable value—who will most resent the new proposals.

I have no message for Labour Members, but I say this to my right hon. and hon. Friends: those are the people about whom we should be most concerned, because modern Conservatism has widened its appeal by embracing the instincts of those who want independence and self-reliance. If there is a pivotal point at which the political pendulum is hinged, it is that group of people who have lifted themselves not to great wealth, but clear of dependency on the state and into a position of self-reliance —the council tenants who have bought their homes, the newly self-employed and the thrifty who have saved for their retirement. It is those people, still living in the old terraced houses on council estates everywhere, which the local rateable value reflects as being on low incomes, who will suffer disproportionately from the Government's proposals.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East did not argue that he had a formula of impeccable integrity to deal with all those issues, and the Government will again make fun at the margins. Very generously, they conceded that when we are talking about the threshold of the higher band of tax, only £100 or so is likely to be at stake for those who have a net take-home income of more than £20,000. They put forward the idea that someone with the wit, the skill, the ingenuity and the imagination to reach the point of threshold and to move £1 over it lacks the wit, the ingenuity and the skill to say to his boss, "I do not want the other £1," or to say "Look mate, if you want me as a young budding manager in this company you had better pay me £201 to make it worth my while." The bosses will say, "No. We are not prepared to negotiate with you on the threshold of this senior management level into which you are going." That shows the credibility of my right hon. and hon. Friends' argument.

I concede that there will be some people—poor things —who will not discover until a year or so later that they have entered the realms of fantasy where they earn such high salaries. If we vote for my hon. Friend's proposals tonight, we shall have to explain the position to those people on the doorsteps.

I have received a letter from the town clerk of Wimborne Minster town council—not an area associated with the Labour party or the raving loonies of the Left-wing extremist authorities. He wanted me to know about the effect of the community charge on a typical low-rated house with a rateable value of £100. He told me that the consequences of the Government's proposal will be that a rates bill for two people will increase from £218 to £570.

The poorest people living in that area of Dorset will have to pay an extra £352 a year. They will be unable to negotiate a pay rise to cover the penalty of moving from one band to another. They will have no choice but to pay the increase. They will not be doing so to avoid the extravagances of Labour authorities, but to protect themselves from Dorset county council—to bring accountability to parts of England that are and always have been Tory controlled, in the name of enhanced local government accountability.

The House will wish to judge whether we are striking the right balance between the poor chap facing the agony of the decision whether to accept another £1 and go into the higher band and those people who are forced to accept the thought that, at that level of prosperity, they will have to pay another £7 a week because we introduced a community charge that was fair and reflected people's ability to pay.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East must plead guilty to the charge that his proposals are complex. In a well-reasoned speech, my hon. Friend made clear how complex they are. But the House will wish to ask whether his proposals are complex or whether the community charge itself is complex. My hon. Friend proposes that the form should ask one or two extra questions, but he did not design the system under which 35 million citizens will

[Mr. Heseltine]

receive those forms in the first place. Those forms will have to be checked by an army of local authority officials. If I am bitter, it is because, when I was Secretary of State for the Environment, I greatly reduced local authority manpower, only to see it increase again now to police, not my hon. Friend's proposals, but the proposals of my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench.

Those officials are there to record not only whether 35 million people are honest enough to declare whether they have lodgers, children or other family members in their homes, but the 3·5 million people who will move every year, claim rebates and change their circumstances. Perhaps their incomes will increase—I cannot tell. But the Government suggest that we register 35 million people, with all their lodgers and second homes, 3·5 million of whom will move every year in the ordinary course of life.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East must plead guilty. He has made the system more complex, but where will the electorate believe the responsibility lies? My right hon. and hon. Friends will wish to ponder the answer to that question. My hon. Friend may have made a system of enormous complexity marginally more complex, but I do not believe for an instant that the public will perceive that the weakness of what will happen is the fault of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East.

We are told that my hon. Friend's new clause is unnecessary, because the rich already pay more. That is an interesting argument, and again my right hon. and hon. Friends will wish to ponder how convincing it will sound when, as they stand on the doorsteps explaining the complexities of the system, they point to the large house across the road and say, "Do not worry. They are paying more for local services because they pay more taxes."

Taxation is not just a matter of arithmetic; it is a matter of perception. When we are trying to persuade people at the lower levels of income to pay a great deal more than they have ever paid to their local authorities, and they know that they are paying precisely the same as the richest in the land, they may not accept the argument that the richest in the land pay more through the tax system. That will be especially so in those low-spending Tory local authorities where the amount of taxpayers' support coming through will be extremely small, because there will be no need in some of those authorities for there to be any equalising process from central Government. If there is, it will be very little because it will basically be the community charge and the business unified rate.

8.30 pm

Mr. Howard: If my right hon. Friend is so totally opposed to the introduction of the community charge, can he tell the House why he voted for its introduction in Scotland?

Mr. Heseltine: I have no doubt that it was for exactly the same reason as other members of the Cabinet who were just as opposed to the concept of a poll tax and who were faced with the decision of what to do: we recognised the wider political party interests involved.

Is my hon. and learned Friend saying that what he wanted me to do was to go around the country before the election arguing against the policy that he was proposing? That was not what my right hon. and hon. Friends were urging me to do. I do my best to help the Tory party, but I do not believe that I would have been helping it by following the advice that my hon. and learned Friend is apparently suggesting that I should have taken. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Before the Labour party starts down the track of assuming that anyone who speaks for any party at any time believes in every single thing that that party says, what about its nuclear disarmament policies? The majority of the shadow Cabinet do not believe in one-sided disarmament policies, but they had no difficulty in advocating them during the election campaign.

The revolution of opportunity that the Government have made their own and upon which they have embarked rests upon the concept of consent. Increasingly, as the decade has advanced, that consent has been forthcoming because the spreading wealth and ownership that it has generated has created its own sense of fairness. Those who excelled were admired because so many in society had themselves gained. The entrepreneur at the top of the pile was seen only as an example to stimulate the newly self-employed. The council tenant saw the attractions of home ownership—even for those who had made significant gains in large valuable homes—and became determined to share in the growing prosperity.

The Conservative party has enabled that consent to be drawn in gathering scale from the community at large. But the assumptions of that fair society are challenged by a local charge, independent of people's resources. The fairness upon which we pride ourselves is affronted. If my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East pushes his new clause to a Division, I shall vote for him and his new clause. I shall do so not from any sense of enthusiasm for the detail, but from an unswerving allegiance to the principles upon which it is based.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): New clause 1 and clause 1 need to be seen in the context of the assault on local government and local democracy that has been launched by the Government since they were first elected in 1979. Grants have been cut from 61 per cent. to under 40 per cent. In Derbyshire, grant capping has occurred. In the Bill there are proposals to introduce poll tax capping because, despite all the arguments about accountability, people are not to be trusted to be accountable if they vote for high poll tax levels.

The impact of cuts and capping has been to destroy a system of rating. Rate increases have taken place to provide much needed services. The cuts have enabled the Government to destroy the system and then come along and describe it as unfair and to argue that the poll tax is the only alternative. Rates had a rough and ready justice about them in that, in general, the poorer people lived in poorer property and the rich lived in larger properties. A tax that was related to the size of property, together with other facilities introduced a reasonable fairness to the system. The poll tax is no solution to the problems that have been created.

Local government has also faced the abolition of the metropolitan counties. The county of South Yorkshire was abolished. On one occasion, a fantastic bus service was provided in that area and all sorts of provisions were made to ensure that other services were linked with that transport system. Local government is also faced with privatisation proposals in relation to the Government's plans for contract compliance. All those measures have

combined to push local government down. Now the poll tax provisions are to be introduced, and they represent the final destruction of local government and local democracy.

In common with other hon. Members, I wish to discuss the fairness or otherwise of the measure. The poll tax, given certain exemptions and the rebate scheme, insists that, within the same district, everyone should pay the same amount per head. Furthermore, the internal logic and the pressures of the Bill are clearly intended to try to introduce a form of rough and ready harmonisation across the districts so that the level of poll tax charged in different areas of the country will, as a result of the pressures of the legislation and political pressures, be roughly the same. It will be quite possible for us to talk about millionaires in different parts of the country who will be expected to pay the same as people who live in modest circumstances.

The exemptions—they will be dealt with in later amendments—either deal with modest elements in terms of the deserving who need to be considered, or affect prisoners, visiting forces and diplomats. Those categories represent an additional problem in terms of whether they should be added to an exemption list.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) referred to the press release issued by the Department of the Environment on 13 January. It stated that 53 per cent. of householders would be gainers, but "householders" does not describe the population who will be poll taxed correctly and fairly. In Dronfield in my constituency, the figures in one street have been investigated. They show that 26 households will be gainers and 15 will be losers. However, if we add that figure to the number of those over 18—the electorate—in those houses, it means that there will be 42 gainers and 47 losers.

The whole thing is mad political arithmetic on the part of the Government. They are introducing a measure by which there will be far more losers than gainers among the electorate. In the south-east, 71 per cent. of households will gain, compared with 70 per cent. of losers in Yorkshire and Humberside. The divisions between the north and the south will be exacerbated.

My constituency is within the east midlands, within which 51 per cent. of households will lose—60 per cent. of those in the north-east Derbyshire district area. My constituency is wedged between the Labour-dominated constituency of Bolsover and the Conservative constituency of West Derbyshire. It is split down the middle socially. To the east there is a solid Labour area and to the west there is a strong Conservative area.

Let us consider the seven wards where there will be the major losers and the seven wards where there will be gainers. They are divided entirely on political grounds between Labour and anti-Labour political forces, mainly Conservatives and Independents masquerading as Conservatives. That is an unhealthy situation, which will be reflected in the rest of the country.

It is a serious problem for my constituency. Places such as Renishaw, where the pit is being closed and where 70 per cent. of households will be losers, will contrast sharply with areas such as Brampton and Walton, where 59 per cent. of people will be gainers. It is not healthy to have such figures. The social reality to which they relate will mean some people supporting the measure merely because it will be to their own benefit, whereas others will desperately oppose it because they cannot pay the poll tax and feel justified in not paying it in those circumstances. That will create great social problems as people find that they are unable to meet the bills that they are expected to face.

There are many other inappropriate measures in the Bill, which we shall be debating later, following on from the clauses that we are discussing now. They include the serious attack on civil liberties mentioned by Conservative Members in connection with the new clause and concern the difficulties of obtaining information. However, that is nothing compared with the difficulties in the bureaucratic system set up by registration officers seeking to unearth information. They will seek to unearth information which, first, requires registration.

Secondly, when such registrations need to be checked, immediate reference will be made, initially, to the electoral register. This register will create considerable problems because the information from the MORI survey in Manchester, together with the indications from Scotland, suggest that masses of people will not register for the electoral register as a means of avoiding, or seeking to evade, payment of the poll tax.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that we have been down that road for some time in Scotland? I held an open meeting in my constituency last Friday, when the hall was packed, and at question time there were only two dissenting voices. People there are beginning to realise how fair is the community charge in Scotland.

Mr. Barnes: I am sure that there are many right hon. and hon. Members on this side of the House who have attended packed meetings in Scotland and who have faced an entirely different situation from that which the hon. Gentleman describes. Whatever it may be that is generating public response at particular meetings, there will be situations in which masses of people will begin to disappear from the electoral register.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): I had no intention of intervening in my hon. Friend's speech, but one might as well stop the House from being completely misled by the unscientific evidence just presented by the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker). I advise my hon. Friend that, when the Government set out with this legislation, the opinion polls of MORI and System 3 showed that 40 per cent. of those questioned supported it. After two years of the hon. Gentleman's Front-Bench colleagues going forth in an effort to multiply, support for the poll tax in Scotland has fallen to 15 per cent. I am sure that my hon. Friends in England and Wales cannot wait for the Government Front Bench to do a similar job there, because the more people know about poll tax the more they reject it.

8.45 pm

Mr. Barnes: I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution, which puts the situation in Scotland into proper perspective.

In addition to the attack on civil liberties that I have mentioned, tremendous centralisation is involved in the Bill, which follows from the clause now before the House concerning the need for poll tax provisions. I have already mentioned poll tax capping, which gives greater authority to the Secretary of State. He also has power over rebate levels and the operation of the national business rate. That is a trend in which the Government are involved in

[Mr. Barnes]

education, which gives considerable authority to central Government. When I raised that point during the debate on the timetable motion, I described the Secretary of State as acting like a municipal Mussolini. I did not expect that he would enjoy being so described, but when he came to sum up afterwards, he thought that it was some form of compliment.

The worst element of the centralisation factor is that which begins to use the Bill so that, when it comes to elections, people are given Hobson's choice in respect of how they should act. Labour authorities will have to decide whether they are to protect services or are to take the poll tax down, because it will even hit people entitled to rebates and others in modest circumstances. In that situation, it will be something of a Hobson's choice operated by the system, because Labour authorities must act like Conservative councils or they will find that the pressures on them are unreasonable. People in the electorate will begin to abstain or keep out of the electoral system, which would help to achieve the results that the Government require.

That situation, added to up to 10 per cent. of people disappearing from the electoral register, is one of the most serious ills in this measure. It could be described as disfranchising the people. It is something about which all right hon. and hon. Members should be deeply concerned.

In the House on 28 March, during a debate on community charges in Scotland, the Minister of State said in summing up:

"The hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham), in a telling intervention, asked what was the point of all the petitions that he and his hon. Friends have been submitting. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) pointed out, they could be a useful source of names and addresses for the community charge registration officer."

Later, my hon. Friend asked:

"Is the Minister saying that from now on the names and addresses on petitions will be used for purposes of gathering the poll tax?"

The reply was:

"That is broadly what I suggested."—[*Official Report*, 28 March 1988; Vol. 130, c. 851.]

I hope that the Secretary of State will disown those remarks and state that petitions will not be used in that sense and that duress will not be placed on people signing petitions objecting to legislation.

A fact sheet published by the House of Commons Public Information Office deals with the subject of petitioning. It points out:

"The right of the subject to petition the Monarch for redress of personal grievances, well known and exercised, probably since Saxon times, was implicitly recognised in Magna Carta; and more explicitly laid down in legislation in 1406 . . . Parliament itself arguably originated in those meetings of the King's Council which considered petitions. The first known petition to the Lords and to both Houses of Parliament date from the reign of Henry III."

It is a serious interference with the rights of citizens in this country when Ministers suggest that petitioning rights are something that should be used against people who take a line and oppose measures that the Government wish to push forward. The Government's authority should not be used in this way. This legislation introduces serious democratic interference, unless the Government will move away from this particular aspect, both in terms of the electorate, where the franchise is being reduced, and in terms of the traditional rights for petitioning.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): I am sure that the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) will forgive me if, in view of the constraints of time, I do not follow his more general arguments, but I should like to comment later on what he said about Scotland.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) has made a genuine effort to meet problems which he recognises in the Government's proposals, but the question for the House is whether the alleged benefits would be greater than the consequences of voting for new clause 1. It should be remembered that those consequences will have an affect north as well as south of the border.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), the new militant in Scottish politics, was right in one respect when he said that the situation in Scotland is different. As he said, the Conservative party lost support in Scotland at the last general election. I must tell my right hon. and hon. Friends who may be in some doubt about the point, however, that one of the reasons for that loss of support was revaluation. It was politically cataclysmic, and my right hon. and hon. Friends south of the border are fortunate not to have experienced it.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my hon. Friend agree that the very people in Wimborne to whom our right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) referred would be likely to suffer most from revaluation?

Mr. Stewart: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right. It is my experience that revaluation was cataclysmic because it highlighted the unfairness of the rating system.

In support of new clause 1, my hon. Friends have concentrated on ability to pay and the rather different political argument about what the Conservative party has said in manifestos and the like. I think that ability to pay is not just the obverse of inability to pay. It is about the effects on people who are either genuinely unable to pay or have great difficulty paying. In principle, therefore, the ability to pay argument can be met by a rebate system, as is proposed by the Government.

My hon. Friends are right to consider the effects on certain income groups of community charge and general taxation, but that also is in principle a concern of the Government. It is something that they can correct, if they perceive injustices, using the income tax system.

As for the argument about what has been said previously, it is quite clear that what is important is not what may or may not have been said in 1974, when the Conservative party lost the election, but what was said in 1987. The manifesto then was absolutely clear. We said that we proposed to introduce a fixed rate charge. If any people were in any doubt about what that meant, they had only to check the Scottish legislation. It is inconceivable that a system radically different from that introduced north of the border would be introduced in England and Wales. I do not see how anyone who went into the subject could have been in any doubt about what kind of system the Conservative party proposed.

Mr. Wilson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Stewart: No. I have already said that I shall not give way because of the lack of time.

The new clause may produce small benefits for certain groups. It has other disadvantages, some of which my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) and others have mentioned. We would introduce a wholly new principle in British taxation—the principle of self-assessment. It works in other countries, but the proposal presents several major difficulties. It is clear that a local authority would need to have a tax reference number to pass on to the Inland Revenue. Moreover, one of the features of self-assessment systems is that they work only when the penalties are pretty severe.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East said that he thinks that 99 per cent. of the population are absolutely honest. That is a pretty optimistic view. Self-assessment requires fairly major penalties to be effective. The figure in Eastwood is 101 per cent. Another of the difficulties with a self-assessment system is that forms would have to be filled in on the assumption of a person being in a certain income bracket, but that could change in the year because of changes in earnings and because of variations in mortgage interest rates.

I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends who are considering voting for the new clause will consider the consequences for Scotland as well as south of the border. It is quite clear that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench believe that new clause 1 would lead to an unworkable system and that the Bill would have to be withdrawn. The consequences for Scotland would be chaos. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East said that he recognised that there would be a need to amend the Scottish Bill, but it is not a Bill, it is an Act which comes into effect next April.

The consequences of accepting new clause 1 for Scotland would be cataclysmic. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, who is leading one of the non-payer campaigns, would be encouraged, as would others. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will take account of the implications north and south of the border before they vote.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I note with interest what the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) said about Scotland. Perhaps there is a lesson to be learned from what happened there. It seems that many of the hon. Members who voted for the Scottish legislation did so without understanding it. Of the 44 signatories to the new clause, 36 have supported the Scottish legislation at some stage. On 5 March 1987, moreover, the Abolition of Domestic Rates (Scotland) Bill was given a Third reading. Fifteen Scottish Tories voted for the imposition of a poll tax. Three months later, more than half of them were unemployed. That is what has happened in Scotland as a result of passing ill-advised and ill-thought-out legislation. Some people are living with the consequences.

We have heard that this is a flagship Bill. We have had one flagship speech. It was not the flagship HMS Poll Tax but the flagship HMS Henley. It was perhaps the most stirring and memorable speech of the debate. Where that flagship is sailing we do not know. What turbulent seas it may be going through we can only guess, but I suggest that we shall look back on tonight's debate as the disappearance of HMS Poll Tax in a stream of bubbles, unmourned and lost in a grey, distant sea.

We support the new clause because it improves the Bill marginally. The Bill is bad and it is better to have a less bad Bill. It is not that we believe that the Bill will be welcome if the new clause is agreed to. We support the concept of a local income tax. Nothing that I have heard tonight and nothing that I have heard from the Minister or others has persuaded me that a local income tax is impracticable. If other countries can do it, we can do it, and it is a fairer system for raising revenue.

9 pm

Tonight the chickens have certainly started coming home to roost and three points have become clear from the debate. First, the basic principle behind the tax has not won general acceptance on either side of the House. The doubts that we have heard from hon. Members who have spoken and the doubts that have been apparent on the faces of some of those who have not spoken, during speeches by both Back-Bench and Front-Bench Members, have spoken volumes.

We have heard from which stable the Bill came. It came from the Chingford stable, which may well explain a considerable amount about the Bill. It may be known in future as the Chingford vision, but the Chingford poll tax is certainly nothing to be proud of. I should have thought that the silence that greeted the Secretary of State when he finished his speech would have brought the message home to the Government. As Conservative Members will be aware, there is of course a great difference between a poll tax and a flat-rate poll tax. That is essentially what we are debating here.

Secondly, there is a difference between hon. Members in their understanding of the concept of fairness. The term "fairness" has arisen in many speeches and has meant different things to different people. To the Conservative party, it appears to mean that people pay the same price for a commodity or service that they obtain, irrespective of their ability to pay. The Secretary of State quoted the case of someone on an income of £4,500 as an example of someone who would not be hard done by as a result of the Bill, but the European Community has defined £115 a week as the poverty level. In those circumstances, a married couple without children will certainly be taking the full impact of the Bill.

The present rating system is certainly unfair to single pensioners and widowers, but the poll tax is manifestly more unfair to many more people and that is why it needs to be amended. If it is not amended tonight, we should send a message to another place to say that we are expecting it to do what we have failed to do in Committee and in the Division at the end of this debate.

I do not know whether Conservative Members who talk about fairness and having an even charge for each service really mean that education, public health and the social services should be treated as commodities, like beer, cigarettes or Mars bars. Certainly fairness means something different to many of us and I suspect that that does not just apply to this side of the Chamber. I suspect that the concept of fairness means very much more to many Conservative Members as well. That will be their test when they come to decide how to vote at the end of the debate. That reflects the great division, not just between both sides of the House, but in the approach to fairness in life.

It is ironic to claim that there should be an even charge for local services because the people who receive them do so in even quantities, whether or not that is true. That argument has not been put forward in respect of central

[Mr. Dafydd Wigley]

services. If we are seriously saying that, on the same basis, the charge for hospitals, roads or security services should be on an even basis, the argument loses its validity.

Thirdly, centralisation is an implicit and inevitable consequence of the poll tax. The right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) rightly put his finger on that when he said that, if services are to be offloaded from local government, there will be a temptation for local government to spend more on the residual services. However, if we follow the logic of the right hon. Gentleman's argument, services should be devolved from the centre to local government and local government should be given the freedom to make the charges that it considers fair for funding those services. Those charges should be within a structure that is sufficiently flexible to allow that and to maintain a basic level of service in all parts of the country.

However, if we go down that road without an amendment—perhaps not the amendment proposed tonight, but a more sophisticated amendment from another place—we shall inevitably have a crescendo of calls for services such as education to be directly funded from the central Exchequer. We have heard some hon. Members talk about that tonight, and, if the Prime Minister had not given an absolute commitment in the Chamber in March last year not to bring education into the central Exchequer, the Government might have moved much earlier in that direction.

It is ironic that we are holding this debate only a few weeks after a Budget in which rich people were given a great helping hand, whereas poor people were given next to nothing; and only a few days after the implementation of the social security changes, which have hit poor people even more. We have seen what has happened in Scotland. In Wales, too, with lower average wages, and where the rates are at present relatively low compared with many areas in England, there may be a massive reaction against the tax. Certainly there is no mandate for the changes in Wales, any more than there is in Scotland.

This is a flagship debate. It may be rather late in the day to be looking at the central principle of the legislation but, my goodness, it is much better to recognise the inherent weakness of the legislation even at this late stage than to put on the statute book an Act that will be unworkable and unfair and which will cause a massive reaction throughout these islands.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): My right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) made a powerful speech against the community charge. I suspect that he would have made an even more powerful speech against the idea of a local income tax and a yet more powerful speech against the old rating system. I was unable to detect in any of the words of my right hon. Friend what proposal he might favour in regard to local government expenditure.

My right hon. Friend did one thing clearly. He damned with faint praise—although I understand that he will support it—the new clause tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates). The House will recollect that my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East said that he supported 90 per cent. of the Local Government Finance Bill. It was quite clear that my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley supported little or nothing of the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East said that he was prepared to have his new clause looked at as it was. He said that he thought it was workable and right in principle. I know that some of my right hon. and hon. Friends believe that, no matter what the finer points of it, the principle is what matters. I can well understand that point of view, because I was attracted by the idea of a graduated charge when my hon. Friend first mentioned it. However, the more I have looked at it, the more convinced I have become that not only would it be unworkable but it would be unfair in practice as well as in principle. I shall tell the House why.

First, I take it that we are all agreed that the Government's concessions last Thursday have brought them into line with the proposals of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East and that at least the lower paid have rebates that are more satisfactory than they were. I do not think that there is any difference among hon. Members on that point.

Mr. Wilson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Peter Horden: I will not give way, because I have little time. If I had more time, I should be delighted to give way.

The difference in the practicality of the new clause is on the higher charge for higher taxpayers. My right hon. Friend the Member for Henley said that there is little in that. He said that all that is involved is an extra £110 per head for the rich and that that will not cause much difficulty. I can well understand that point of view. What is not simple—this was mentioned earlier—is that there are some people on the margin. They do not know whether they will be in the higher tax bracket or not. That is not a small number. My right hon. Friend the Member for Henley suggested that few people might fall into that category.

I have made some inquiries of the Inland Revenue. I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East consulted the Inland Revenue among all the other civil servants that he consulted. My inquiries lead me to believe that there are as many as 500,000 people who each year change from being in the category of a standard rate taxpayer to being a higher rate taxpayer. They can do so by any manner of events. They may lose their job, change their occupation or merely have a rise.

It is all very well for my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley to say that it is simply a matter of negotiating with the boss. We are talking about 500,000 people, by whom, according to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East, a form of self-assessment will be made. It will be checked by local authorities with the Inland Revenue. As has been said, anyone who does the self-assessment has to face the sort of inquiries that take place in the United States. I can assure the House that, if that were to be the case, it would be a much more rigorous examination than anything that happens now. It is an impractical suggestion.

What would be the practical effect if my hon. Friend's new clause were to come to pass? I understand that it would raise £200 million and that by redistributing that —as my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East, said, it is not extra money—the rich would pay £110 extra

and the poor would be asked to provide £5 less. All those mountains are to be moved so that the poor will pay £5 a year less before expenses and charges. We are talking about a new clause that, for those paying at standard rate, will make a difference of perhaps £3 or £4 a year, which is hardly a great matter on which to go to the stake.

It is important to consider some practical effects of the new clause. Some of my hon. Friends suggested earlier —my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) did so—that a form of local income tax would be more to the point. Indeed, that is what the Social and Liberal Democratic party has suggested in its amendment. Conservative Members who believe that should join the Social and Liberal Democratic party in voting for new clause 7.

New clause 7 would destroy accountability. In however poor a form, the community charge has some effect with regard to accountability. All the faults with a local income tax that have been mentioned in successive White and Green Papers still remain. I am not saying that the community charge is perfect, but there is no perfect form of charge.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East suggested that his measure would at least help the poor. The practical effect of the new clause is that rich people living in the south of England would pay a higher charge. He suggested that the extra money thus derived would mean that standard ratepayers living in that area would pay less. The total effect would be that the community charge in rich areas would decline, whereas in poor areas it would increase: in other words, the very reverse effect that my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East wants.

If my hon. Friend wants to address the problem, he should try to ensure that poor people are helped by the rate support grant. I believe that this is a very important matter, because in successive years—indeed, ever since the Government took office in 1979—the central plank of the Government's policy has been to reduce rate support grant as a proportion of local government expenditure. There may have been a good case for that in the first two or three years, but if anybody wants to impose difficulties on local authorities and the poorest people they have only to reduce rate support grant, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley did more than anybody else. I believe that that will be the test of the Government in future years.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has at least kept the rate support grant steady. If it declines as a proportion of the whole, we shall no longer be able to claim that the rich, through taxation and the operation of rate support grant, pay 15 times as much as the poor. It is important that, as a proportion, the rate support grant remains at least as large as it is today, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will accept that proposition. I am sure that it will not be an easy measure to get past the Treasury.

In the past, when a reduction in the rate support grant has been proposed, and when some of its effects on local authorities, not on the needs element or their ability to pay, have been seen, some of my right hon. and hon. Friends have voted against it. There cannot be a fixed-rate community charge with a reducing element of rate support grant. I do not believe that that can be tolerated. If it is argued, perfectly validly, that extra support for local authorities should be given through the rate support grant, as envisaged, the high proportion of support given at present must at least be maintained.

I am sure that the motives of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East in moving the new clause were admirable. I believe that as it stands it is fatally flawed in practice and principle. It follows as a necessary collorary that my right hon. and hon. Friends, in considering the proportion of rate support grant, should remember what has been said in the debate and act accordingly.

9.15 pm

Mrs. Fyfe: We have heard from the hon. Member for Horsham (Sir. P. Hordern) the extraordinary proposition that hon. Members should vote against new clause 1 because, if people assessed themselves for the poll tax, there would be closer examination of that self-assessment than there is for the national income tax. The country will listen with interest to that argument. Many millions of honest people who have no control over their tax because they pay through the PAYE system will join me in saying that anyone who honestly declares his income for tax purposes has nothing to fear from such a close examination and it is only right that people should pay what they can afford to pay and what the law requires them to pay. That argument is an irrelevance in this debate.

Many Conservative Members have clearly shown that they care a lot about the fact that people on low incomes will pay the same as the richest in the land. The duke and the dustman have been contrasted. We have learned with great interest that the Secretary of State believes that the dustman should pay the same as the duke. That will resound in Conservative ears for many elections to come. It so happens that the House of Commons does not represent dukes—not yet, anyway—but there are hundreds and thousands of dustmen who will listen to that argument with interest.

The Low Pay Unit, which has been described by the Economic League as a subversive organisation, has produced much interesting information about pay. It has pointed to the appalling fact that poverty among the low paid is worse than it was more than 100 years ago. People on low pay are worse off relative to the average in 1886. Consider how much work was done by social investigators in the late Victorian years and the state of poverty then, when people lived in appalling conditions. It will happen all over again as society increasingly criticises what is happening at the Government's hand.

The bottom 10 per cent. in the earnings league earned 68·6 per cent. of the average wage in 1886, compared with 64·4 per cent. in 1987. It is appalling that 100 years of parliamentary Government have put the poorest paid in a worse position than they were 100 years ago; yet, instead of recognising that, the Government have been bent on demanding that the lowest paid—those who bring home £53 a week—pay the same as the richest. There are 9·4 million workers who earn less than the decency threshold of 68 per cent. of average earnings laid down by the Council of Europe. Forty-four per cent. of the total work force is affected—an awful lot of people, who will oppose this poll tax.

I have one last word of warning about the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart). Hon. Members should not pay attention to his attempt to pull the wool over their eyes. Any Conservative Members deceived into thinking that in the case of the Scottish legislation they were voting

[Mrs. Fyfe]

against revaluation, and not the poll tax, will live and learn. I look forward to the day when Conservative Members do.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): In many ways, this has been a unique debate. In my 14 years service in the House, this is the first time that I have seen two Conservative Members called in succession who did not even rise to speak. That must be a unique experience for all hon. Members. It is a new technique, from which my hon. Friends will attempt to learn.

We all pay tribute to the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) for the way in which he introduced the debate. This has been a general debate that goes to the heart of the Bill. Hon. Members have not bothered too much with facts, but have dealt with principle, because that is what the new clause is all about. It goes to the heart of the Bill. The new clause will undermine the flat-rate nature of the poll tax; that is its whole purpose. There are several ways of doing that, but not all of them are available for debate because of the guillotine.

Many people outside the House are bewildered. At a meeting yesterday afternoon, one of my constituents said to me, "I do not understand. If twice as many people are to pay the same grand total of local government taxation under the poll tax, how is it that me and my wife in our semi are going to pay more in poll tax between us than we pay in rates?" He said, "If 35 million, not 18 million, will be paying how come we are going to end up paying more?" The answer is that the rateable value of his house is less than the average. As instanced by hon. Members on both sides of the House, he is the very kind of person who will end up paying more for his household in poll tax than he pays in rates, and there are many such people in many of our constituencies.

From day one—even in the Green Paper—we were told that one of the reasons for the introduction of a flat rate poll tax was universal accountability, for all the world as though members of households are unaware and do not contribute to local government at the moment. They do contribute. Everybody knows that they contribute. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have said so.

I did not think that I should be able to pray in aid the leader of the Conservatives on Birmingham city council, but in a recent letter to *The Birmingham Post*, Councillor Reg Hales, who complained that I had used figures dealing with individual losers rather than households, said:

"Mr. Rooker complains that I refer to households in assessing the effect of the charge on Birmingham residents, but isn't that how most families work out their expenditure —as a family, not as individuals?"

That is exactly our point. The 18 million ratepayers have 12 million spouses. Already more than 30 million adults contribute directly to the system of local government taxation. It is a falsehood to claim that they do not.

Over the weekend, I honestly thought that we had not been given a concession on Thursday. Given that we were to have a big debate on Monday, I thought, "On Friday, or Saturday, they will do the sums. They will work out that it is not a concession at all." I warned my hon. Friends, "They will have something bigger still on Monday. We have to be prepared for the real concession." Thursday's so-called concession was not worth a row of beans. What a way to deal with the flagship of the Government's legislation.

The press release made no mention of the cost of the concession. "An extra million people on rebate, and yet no figures to show the public expenditure cost," I said to the Prime Minister. Of course there were no figures. That cost will be £130 million, and neither the Prime Minister nor the Secretary of State had the guts to tell the House that a ministerial decision had already been made to claw back the £130 million in 1989-90 by changing the tapers in housing benefit.

That means that the Government intend to claw back the cost of the concession in the year before the poll tax is introduced. They did not even have the guts to tell us that. In the correspondence that we have read from Paul Grey, Roger Bright and Deborah Lamb, it is all there for everyone to see. We have had the Budget, we have had the social security and pension changes, and now we have the poll tax itself. To come along after all that with a so-called concession that is to be paid for by further cuts in benefit to the very low-paid people whom the Government claim they are trying to help is nothing short of damned outrageous.

The Government will prattle on about the gains. Let us look at the figures. The Government have never published a set of rebate tables. They say that they cannot do it. They have never published figures about income or the poll tax or about what the rebates would be. The Library can do it, but not once during nearly 160 hours in Committee did any of the three Ministers change any of the figures produced by the statistical section of the Library about the community charge rebates paid for last December. The Government could have worked them out on the basis of knowing that they would be based on the housing benefit scheme.

What happens after the so-called concession to protect the flagship? It is still the case that in not one local authority except Camden will a student nurse obtain a penny in rebate. That is a measure of the concession on rebates. Student nurses receive £5,000 a year gross. That is £76 a week net, and the amount of poll tax payable will be higher if the Government meet the nurses' pay claim. Perhaps student nurses in Camden will not get a penny either. That is the measure of the rebate concession.

A couple with young children will receive no rebate if they earn over £130 a week—an income that is well below average earnings—and a couple with no children will receive no rebate if their earnings are over £100 a week. Those are the figures that will apply under the average poll tax authority, and we know that the tax payable will be £224, near enough £5 a week per adult.

A couple with a net income of £100 per week will be expected to pay £10—that is, 10 per cent. of their net income—in local authority taxes. The same rate applies to the worker under 25 years of age who will receive no rebate once his earned net income goes above £50 a week. His poll tax will be £5, or 10 per cent. of his income. Conservative Members say that that is OK, that the expenditure pattern of such people is different from the pattern of the well off and that they do not need to spend. They do not have the money to spend. Conservative Members talk as if such people had spare coppers to pay the poll tax. They say that the system is OK for the low-paid. A couple on £100 a week are low-paid and the Government take the view that it is all right for such people to pay 10 per cent. of their net income in poll tax.

The Government have attacked the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) and talked about a massive

earnings trap for higher rate taxpayers. For people on net incomes of over £400 a week, the poll tax payments will not be 10 per cent. of their net earned income. It will not be even 8, 6 or 5 per cent. Only 1·6 per cent. of their net income will be paid in poll tax. That compares with 10 per cent. for a couple on £100 a week. That is a measure of what we are dealing with.

Mr. Leigh *rose*——

Mr. Rooker: No, I shall not give way, because there is no time. The hon. Member voted for the guillotine, as did a majority of his hon. Friends. They have curtailed the debate and have prevented the Opposition from debating new clause 5 and new clause 7. There was no genuine debate on new clause 2, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir George Young). The guillotine has meant that we have to restrict debate to new clause 1. When the guillotine falls it will not even be possible under the rules approved by the Government for hon. Members to vote for any of the alternatives. New clause 1 is our only option. Not even amendment (d) to the new clause or any of the other new clauses can be voted upon.

The Minister will have plenty of time to deal with interventions. He will have to come up with another concession, because Thursday's concession will not save the flagship. We know that it will be paid for by the recipients of benefit and that it is not worth much to the low-paid. As the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) said, it destroys at a stroke the idea of universal accountability, as does the very concept of a rebate. About 9 million people might benefit, but 26 million adults will pay a flat rate charge unrelated to their income. That must be unfair.

If anything has come across in the debate, even from Government supporters, it is the question, which Tory manifesto counts—the 1974 or the 1987 one? One Conservative Member as good as told the hon. Member for Hampshire, East that although the 1974 manifesto referred to fairness and to the ability to pay, the 1987 manifesto did not, and as the electorate voted on that manifesto, we were stuck with it.

The Tories do not want to know about the concept of ability to pay, because it was not in their last manifesto. It was in their manifesto in 1974 when they first pledged to abolish the rates, but now that the time has come to put that pledge into practice, it is convenient to forget about the ability to pay. That is grossly dishonest in a parliamentary democracy that is founded upon the concept of a contract between the winning party and the electorate.

Mr. Tebbit *rose*——

9.30 pm

Mr. Rooker: I am not giving way to that hon. Member —[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] No.

The legislation is about local government taxation. I accept that it is also about the grant system and business rates, but the central argument is about local taxation. It is not a tax bill or a money Bill in the conventional sense of a Finance Bill. During the early stages in Committee, we sought a ruling, through the Clerks, from the experts in the House on what would happen if a Member who was not a member of the Government sought to move an amendment that would introduce a new tax—something that cannot be done in a Finance Bill. We were told that that would be perfectly in order in the House of Commons because, as the money did not form part of the Consolidated Fund, we were not bound by those rules.

We were also advised that the other place operated under its own rules. We wanted to know what would happen if, during the final stages in this House, a hint was given that perhaps the other place might make some change. We were told that we could not be sure of that because this House does not control the other place. In fact, we now have further and better advice from the Public Bill Office. Any Conservative Member who thinks that he can cop out tonight because the experts along the Corridor—those who know about local government and fairness—may force the Government to think again, is wrong.

I wish to quote one brief paragraph about financial privilege as it relates to the Bill:

> "But there are some types of amendments in respect of which the Commons cannot waive their privilege because the Speaker is directed by Standing Order to prevent their consideration by the Commons by negativing them forthwith. Such amendments are said to constitute 'intolerable' breaches of privilege. An amendment to change the nature of the community charge to local income tax would be 'intolerable'. So would an amendment to introduce 'banding' of the charge. The latter would be intolerable because the Commons have fully debated and decided against 'banding'."

There is no Tory long-stop along the Corridor. The decision must be made tonight, and the guillotine ensures that that will happen at 10 o'clock. It is the only way to force the Government to think again—that is what the passing of new clause 1 would achieve. It is not a perfect mechanical tool that has had expert technical drafting. Everyone knows the consequences that will flow for the remainder of the legislation. However, because the Government have a majority, the guillotine motion could be rewritten and further proposals could be delayed for a couple of days. We could pass all the consequential amendments without any difficulty. There is nothing standing in the way of that.

There is no time to do that tonight, but I tell Conservative Members that there will be no time in 1990 when poll tax bills start dropping through doors. There will be no time whatsoever. It will be no good saying, as they said last week in respect of social security, "I wish that we had dealt with the matter in a bit more detail in 1986 to stop this mess-up in 1988." Tonight is the time to change what will happen in 1990. We should get on with it.

Mr. Howard: The most striking feature of the debate has been the extent to which all the ideas—and all the constructive thinking—have come from the Government Benches. Opposition Members are bereft of any fresh thinking on the matter. Their opposition has been described as vacuous by no less a person that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition himself. They will go into the Division Lobby in support of the new clause, if my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) presses it to a Division, not because they care tuppence about the new clause—the Leader of the Opposition himself has made that clear—but simply because they see in it a device for embarrassing the Government. It is a display of cynicism that is entirely characteristic of the Opposition.

At the heart of the debate has been the ability to pay. That phrase clearly means different things to different people. For example, the present rating system is poorly

[Mr. Howard]

related to ability to pay. Nearly half the houses in this country with above average rateable values are occupied by households with below average incomes, and nearly half the households with above average incomes live in houses with below average rateable values. The system that we are sweeping away with the proposals enshrined in the Bill scores badly indeed on the criterion of ability to pay.

The proposals that we seek to put in place of that discredited system are much better related to ability to pay. Families with a net income of up to £150 a week will, on average, pay less in community charge than they pay in rates. Many of the poorest sections of our community—80 per cent. of single pensioner households and 80 per cent. of single-parent families—will pay less in community charge than they pay in rates. Of course, their position will be significantly improved by the additional rebates that were announced last week by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Minister confirm that, despite last week's announcement about rebates, in every area in which the poll tax will be higher than average, no matter what their income may be, all individuals will have to pay something, whereas now some get a complete rebate and pay nothing at all?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is as wrong as he usually is about such matters. People now have to make a contribution towards rates, regardless of their incomes.

As a result of the proposals by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, those who are least well off at the bottom end of the income scale will have a community charge that is entirely related to ability to pay. That is where it matters most. That is where it will fully apply.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) said in an article in *The Times* last November,

"We have to be absolutely sure that . . . the not quite poor do not get a raw deal."

I agree with my right hon. Friend. The improved rebates announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will fully meet that requirement.

I appreciate that many of my hon. Friends would like to see that principle of ability to pay extended throughout the income scale. Taking the system as a whole, as my right hon. Friend has explained, that is indeed the case. The community charge will account for only a quarter of the cost of local authority services. The top 10 per cent. of households by income will pay 15 times as much towards the cost of local authority services as the bottom 10 per cent. So, in that real sense, the rich will pay far more than the poor.

But some of my hon. Friends say that that is not enough. In their view, the community charge itself must be related directly across the whole range of incomes to the principle of ability to pay. There is only way in which that could be achieved. I hope that my hon. Friends are in no doubt about it. That can only be done through the introduction of a local income tax.

Mr. Wilson: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: No, I am not giving way to the party that has made no constructive contribution to this debate at all.

I know that one or two of my hon. Friends are in favour of a local income tax, but I suspect that the overwhelming majority of them are not. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East says that he is not. According to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the Labour party may wish to combine local income tax with a property tax, but even that party does not put forward the proposition that local income tax alone should pay the cost of local government. Indeed, Opposition Members were warned in the clearest possible terms against doing so by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw)—at the time Opposition spokesman on local government matters—when he advanced no fewer than 10 separate reasons why a local income tax would be a bad way of paying for local government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East has sought to avoid the dangers of a local income tax, because he recognises them. He has done his best to produce a scheme which relates the community charge more closely to the ability to pay, while avoiding the worst dangers of a local income tax. It is no fault of my hon. Friend that his best endeavours have been unsuccessful. He has, in fact, failed in the task that he has set himself, because it is simply impossible to produce a system which seeks to relate payment to ability to pay across the whole range of incomes without introducing a full-blown local income tax.

The defects in my hon. Friend's proposals have been referred to more than once—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Winnick *rose*——

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister said that he was not giving way.

Mr. Howard: The defects in my hon. Friend's proposals have been referred to more than once during the debate. The fact is that, as a person stepped from one band to another for a trifling increase in income, he or she would face an extra bill for the community charge which could run into hundreds of pounds a year. That is not simply the case when one moves from the standard rate to the higher rate of income tax. That would also be true—contrary to what was said by my hon. Friend—when one moves from a position of not being liable to income tax at all to becoming liable to it for the first time. That is not an accident. It is not a superficial problem that can be ironed out with a few more Green Papers or White Papers. It is absolutely fundamental to any banded charge proposal.

Mr. Mates: I am sorry to resurrect this, but there is a fundamental point, which my hon. and learned Friend has already stated, which he must in all honesty repeat. There is a step at each of these stages. Is it not a fact, and has he not acknowledged, that if the House were to adopt my new clause and graft it on to the Government's rebate schemes, not one person in the lower paid bracket would be worse off under my scheme than under his?

Mr. Howard: As my hon. Friend agrees, up to the point where they reach the step in his scheme, that is correct. However, that does not do away with the trap that is inherent in his scheme. It remains a fact that, as one reaches that trap, for a trifling increase in income, one

would become liable to pay up to hundreds of pounds more in community charge—*Interruption.]* Hon. Members are wrong.

Mr. Mates *rose*——

Mr. Howard: I shall give way to my hon. Friend in a moment.

That is not the case under our scheme. Under our scheme, for every extra pound in income, one cannot lose any more than 15p. However, under a banded charge, including my hon. Friend's version, one can end up losing several hundred pounds.

Mr. Mates: I am sorry to interrupt my hon. and learned Friend again, but this is such a fundamental point that we must at least make sure that the whole House understands it. If my scheme is adopted, there is a moment when one stops being entitled to pay only half the community charge and becomes liable to pay most, if not all, of it, but at that point—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members should wait because this is the interesting point that we must get across. It is when one has lost that half entitlement that one returns to the point on the line at which the Government would place that same person. Therefore, that person would not be one penny worse off.

9.45 pm

Mr. Howard: That is not necessarily the case. It depends upon the precise application of the rebate at that point. There will be many cases in which the rebate will not apply and someone will come into tax for the first time and have to meet the full community charge. They will find themselves with an additional liability of several hundred pounds. That is an inescapable consequence of my hon. Friend's case.

My hon. Friend justifies his proposal on the basis of what he regards as its presentational advantages compared with the Government's scheme. I certainly do not relish explaining on the doorstep or in my surgery to an irate contituent whose bill had gone up by hundreds of pounds a year because his income had increased by a trifling amount that that was a price that he had to pay in order to get a scheme that was more related across the range, so-called, to ability to pay. I would not expect any sympathy from any constituent of mine in receipt of such advice, and I do not think that I would be alone in that situation—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This has been a very good-tempered debate until now. I ask the House to give the Minister a fair hearing.

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) referred to several other anomalies that would arise. Some were pointed out in a question that was put to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East by my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Mr. Wood) about the position of non-working wives. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East dealt with that by saying that only non-working wives would pay the community charge at the same rate as their husbands. However, I fear that that inescapably leads to further anomalies.

I shall give the House the figures. Under the proposal of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East, in the case of a wife with no income who is married to a higher-rate taxpayer, both the higher-rate taxpayer and his wife would pay 150 per cent. of the community charge. If the wife has an income of £10,000 per year of her own, and is married to a higher-rate taxpayer, although the husband would continue to pay 150 per cent. she would pay only 100 per cent.—less than she would pay if she were a non-working wife. If she has a still lower income, she might end up paying 50 per cent. of the charge while her husband continued to pay 150 per cent. That kind of anomaly is bound to arise under my hon. Friend's scheme.

The same applies to the other difficulties that have been identified. With the best will in the world, it is no use my hon. Friend saying, "Take my scheme away; look at it again; all I am interested in is the principle." The unavoidable fact is that, if one wants to relate a charge or tax, call it what one will, to income, one has to have an income tax that avoids the steps, the bands and the traps which are such an inherent feature of my hon. Friend's scheme.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) made a powerful speech; but it was a powerful speech against the whole principle of the community charge. It was certainly not a speech in support of the new clause tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East. My right hon. Friend the Member for Henley talked about accountability. He suggested that the Government's scheme had lost accountability because of our rebates. I do not agree with my right hon. Friend about that, but, if he is right, that problem would be made much worse under the provisions of my hon. Friend's new clause.

My right hon. Friend mentioned the sense of grievance of a person who was above the rebate level and no longer entitled to it. No doubt he would be aggrieved, but how much greater would be the grievance felt by someone who encountered the traps inherent in my hon. Friend's scheme?

Mr. Heseltine: Why would anybody feel aggrieved at encountering a trap from which he did not lose any money?

Mr. Howard: I have made it perfectly plain that such people would lose hundreds of pounds for the sake of a trifling increase in income—*[Laughter.]* Hon. Members may mock, but that is the fact of the matter. The Leader of the Opposition mocks, but he recognised that aspect of my hon. Friend's scheme in its early days.

Finally, my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley gave the House an amusing example from Dorset, which he rightly said could be not be regarded as a high-spending council whose irresponsibility we wish to curb. He is right about Dorset county council, but the community charge figures he gave were wrong. He referred to a house in Wimborne with a rateable value of £100, but he did not say that the rate bill now would be £195 and that the community charge would be £173—*[Interruption.]* Yes, per person. My right hon. Friend gave the figure of £516 for a couple living in Wimborne, and that is nearly £200 more than the community charge.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will my hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Howard: No, I want to refer—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] No, I must leave time for my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East and I want to deal with—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister is not giving way.

Mr. Howard: I want to deal with an important point made by my right hon. Friends the Members for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery) and for Woking (Mr. Onslow). They suggested that the impact of the community charge could be alleviated by increasing the rate support grant—the proportion of local government spending paid by central Government. My right hon. Friend the Member for Henley clearly disagreed with them and expressed a different view, so there is no consensus on that important question. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the mechanism for an increased contribution from central Government and for more money in rate support grant is provided in the Government's proposals. In future years we shall no doubt have to consider how that mechanism is to be used.

I can well understand the desire of my hon. Friends to find a system of paying for local government that will meet all their anxieties, but that holy grail does not exist. If they want a local income tax—and I understand their view—but I cannot give it to them, neither will the scheme of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East. If they want to keep the existing rate system, as one or two do—and I understand their view—but I cannot give it to them, neither will my hon. Friend's scheme.

But if they want a new and improved system of paying for local government that will provide the British people with the advantages of fairness and accountability, without the anomalies, uncertainties and, yes, injustices of all other proposals, including that of my hon. Friend, the only way forward is the way that is enshrined in our manifesto.

How dare the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) talk about dishonesty and our breaking faith with the electorate? Our manifesto sets out in detail the proposals for a community charge, on which we fought and won the general election, and those proposals are enshrined in the Bill. It is for all those reasons that I urge my hon. Friends to reject the new clause.

Mr. Mates: With the leave of the House, may I make a few comments in reply. Of course I agree with the Minister that it has been a constructive debate, and I do not want it to be spoilt by the only difference of fact that we have had during four months of debate, private and public. During those four months, it has been my hon. and learned Friend's position that, although he did not like it and thought that it was flawed, my plan did not leave any of the lower paid a penny worse off than his did. When I put that to him tonight, he said that it was not necessarily so. That is a world of difference. I am sure that he did not want to mislead the House, so I want to know whether he agrees that if my new clause was carried—I know that there is a jump, and the price that must be paid—no one would be worse off than he would be under his scheme. I would like a quick yes or no answer, because I should hate us to end on any terms other than that.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend knows the answer. Until one reached that trap, it is true that no one would be worse off. But when one reaches the trap, as one's earnings increase by a trifling amount one can become liable to several hundreds of pounds extra community charge. That is the fact of the matter, and it is impossible to escape it.

Mr. Mates: But it is the same amount of liability as exists under the Government's scheme—my hon. and learned Friend does not deny that—which means that they would be no worse off under my scheme.

I will not pursue that matter, because, as we go into the Lobbies very soon now, I believe that this vote will not be about the minutiae of the new clause. Nor—I say this with all the passion that I feel—is it about wrecking the Government's Bill. We can still proceed perfectly well with the community charge on a banded basis. That is what many people have been advocating inside and outside the House, and most recently from the heartland of Conservative support has come yet one more plea to reconsider the matter.

That is why I introduced the new clause, and if a message is sent from the House tonight that we are not entirely satisfied with this aspect of the Bill, I hope that the Government will listen. Until now, they have been listening with a little reluctance. We have a long way to go before the Bill becomes law, and many more changes will be made. Many changes will be made to the Bill this week, and no doubt many changes will be made, not by their Lordships but by the Government, in another place. Complex legislation changes constantly in the light of experience, research and what people are told will be the consequences that no one could have foreseen.

There is no doubt that that would happen, too, if we were considering the principle of a banded community charge. That is why I have said all along that if they would only concede the principle, I should be content to leave the details to a Government who get most things right—[HON. MEMBERS: "It cannot be done."] Hon. Members say that we cannot do it. Last Monday, someone said that we cannot do anything to make the position better. Then 30 of my hon. Friends had signed the new clause. On Tuesday, 40 had signed, but nothing could be done. By Wednesday, 51 had signed, and something was done on Thursday. I am sorry to have to say that, but it is incontestably the truth.

One does not become more or less disloyal—if that is the word that people wish to use—simply by pressing one's point a little harder. The question is whether one's point is sound. Some of us believe that the point is sound. Some of us believe that the matter should be reconsidered and some of us believe that if it was possible to meet the point, the Bill would be the better for it. If it was met, all of us could go about our soulless task in two years' time and say, "It may not be popular, because no tax is, but we have done our damnedest to make it fair."

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 295, Noes 320.

Division No. 262] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*	Barron, Kevin
Adley, Robert	Battle, John
Aitken, Jonathan	Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Allen, Graham	Beckett, Margaret
Alton, David	Beggs, Roy
Anderson, Donald	Beith, A. J.
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Bell, Stuart
Armstrong, Hilary	Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Ashdown, Paddy	Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Benyon, W.
Ashton, Joe	Bermingham, Gerald
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Bidwell, Sydney
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Biffen, Rt Hon John

Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Patrick
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Critchley, Julian
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Dykes, Hugh
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gordon, Mildred
Gorst, John
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hardy, Peter
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haselhurst, Alan
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Haynes, Frank
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Illsley, Eric
Irvine, Michael
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Knox, David
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCusker, Harold
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Randall, Stuart
Rathbone, Tim
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Riddick, Graham
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Yeo, Tim
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir George Young and
Mr. Robin Squire.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Budgen, Nicholas

Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Mariand, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.

Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee), to be further considered tomorrow.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. At the conclusion of the debate tonight, it is clear that at least 38 members of the Conservative party have voted for the new clause presented by the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates). Other Conservative Members abstained and yet others were cowed and coerced into supporting the Government.

It is clear that the flagship is badly holed and sinking fast and that the measure will leave the House for another place without a clear mandate from the House of

Commons. The country will know that, the other part of Parliament will know it and the Bill can still be stopped in its tracks.

It is only right, given the importance of this issue— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I called the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Kinnock: It is only right, given the importance of the issue and the small nature of the Government's majority, that we secure from the Government tonight a statement as to their intentions on a measure that will relate local taxation to the ability of people to pay.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House has made its decision.

PETITIONS

Pensioners

Mr. Speaker: There are six petitions and I shall call Mr. Roland Boyes first.

10.20 pm

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): I beg to ask leave to present a petition. It shows that pensioners in the Tyne, Wear, Durham and District Pensioners Associaton

"will suffer great hardship because of the poll tax, the increases in the price of electricity and the meagre winter heating allowance."

It is signed in the name of Mr. Huggins of 49 Wenlock, Biddick, Washington and many others.

The poll tax is a uniquely selfish piece of legislation. Pensioners are just one of the already disadvantaged groups that will be hit hard by its effects. We have the obscene situation in which a third of single pensioners will be worse off by up to £5 a week, a million pensioner couples will be paying more than they do now and those who choose to care for elderly relatives will have to consider whether they will be able to afford to keep the old person in the family home. Inflicting further hardship on the old and forcing families to put elderly relatives into local authority homes is a wicked, vicious and immoral act on the part of the party that is supposed to uphold family values.

I received a letter this morning from an elderly woman in my constituency——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman he must not make a speech when presenting a petition. He should summarise the letter briefly.

Mr. Boyes: The letter was from an elderly woman who has already been hard-hit by the social security changes. That letter says it all. It says:

"With all that the Government is doing to old people, what on earth is there for us to live for?"

That is the question.

To lie upon the Table.

10.21 pm

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): I beg to ask leave to present a petition with over 10,000 signatures collected by the Tyne, Wear, Durham and District Pensioners Association, members of the Labour party in Sunderland and by the Sunderland campaign against the poll tax. The petition reads:

"To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain, Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The Honourable Petition of members of the Tyne, Wear, Durham and District Pensioners Association and other pensioners sheweth:—

That pensioners will suffer great hardship because of the introduction of the poll tax, increases in the price of electricity and the meagre winter heating allowance. Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will urge the Government to take such actions as are necessary to prevent pensioners suffering because of these circumstances. And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

As I have said, over 10,000 people have signed the petition. There are many thousands of signatures from the Tyne and Wear area being presented tonight and there are many thousands of people still signing the petition. The

[Mr. Bob Clay]

signatures still being taken in the Sunderland area, other parts of Tyne and Wear and, no doubt, throughout the rest of the United Kingdom, demonstrate that the people of this country are overwhelmingly opposed to the wicked and evil piece of legislation that will make so many people worse off and so many wealthy people even more wealthy.

The people who are presenting the petition believe that the poll tax is a piece of social inequality. It is the most appalling piece of legislation going through the House at present and the overwhelming majority of people, as sthe petitions prove, wish that it could be stopped.

To lie upon the Table.

10.23 pm

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Like my hon. Friends the Members for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) and for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) I beg to ask leave to present a petition. The petition reads:

"To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom, of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, the humble petition of Members of the Tyne, Wear, Durham and District Pensioners Association and other pensioners."

It is in the name of James Sim, the secretary, 38 Ellen Court, and many others in the Jarrow constituency.

The petition states:

"That pensioners will suffer great hardship because of the introduction of the poll tax, the increases in the price of electricity and the meagre winter heating allowance."

Tonight we have heard many speeches from both sides of the House about the hardship that the poll tax will inflict on the poorest in our community. This petition is not from those who talk about the hardship but from those upon whom it is imposed.

To lie upon the Table.

10.24 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I beg leave to introduce a petition signed by several hundreds of pensioners in my constituency and elsewhere in Tyne and Wear.

Like the other petitioners that have been presented, the signatures were collected by the Tyne and Wear, Durham and District Pensioners Association in protest against the proposed poll tax, the rise in electricity prices and the meagre winter heating allowances.

The petitioners pray that the House will take such actions as are necessary to prevent pensioners from suffering as a result of those and other measures.

To lie upon the Table.

10.25 pm

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): I wish to present a petition on behalf of 300 pensioners who are resident in my constituency and the surrounding area of Tyne and Wear.

The petition urges the Government to take measures to prevent pensioners suffering hardship because of the poll tax, the increases in the price of electricity and the meagre winter heating allowances.

I know from my contact with the signatories to the petition that they are concerned about the range of Government policies affecting pensioners, such as the cuts in housing benefit, the refusal to maintain the link between pensions, prices and earnings, the refusal to introduce measures such as concessionary television licences and the squeeze on local authorities, which mean that the concessionary provisions for travel that are offered to pensioners are being reduced or are under pressure in many areas.

Under the Government, pensioners look forward not to a long and happy retirement but with apprehension to trying to make ends meet in difficult circumstances. What a reward for a lifetime of work and contribution to society.

The petition reads:

"Wherefore your petitioners pray that your Honourable House will urge the Government to take such actions as are necessary to prevent pensioners suffering because of these circumstances."

To lie upon the Table.

10.26 pm

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): I wish to submit a petition from pensioners who are living in and around my constituency in Tyne Bridge. It has been organised and submitted by the Tyne and Wear, Durham and District Pensioners Association and other pensioners.

The petition sheweth,

"That pensioners will suffer great hardship because of the introduction of the poll tax, increases in the price of electricity and the meagre winter heating allowance."

The petition has been signed by 343 pensioners, who will feel badly let down by a small majority in the House.

To lie upon the Table.

Supplementary Benefit Appeals

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

10.27 pm

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will recall that last week Mr. Speaker accepted an application by my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) for a debate under Standing Order No. 20.

The debate was on the effects of the Social Security Act 1986 on claimants in receipt of DHSS benefits. Mr. Speaker rightly adopted the rare practice of granting a debate under Standing Order No. 20. Opposition Members were fully aware of the growing anger and concern of the vast majority of British people. To some extent that anger and concern was reflected in the atmosphere in the House last week. The anger of Opposition Members was evident, and the Opposition Front Bench made it clear that people outside this place were becoming aware of the worst excesses of this Tory Government.

The uneasiness of Government Back Benchers was indicative of their uncertainty about the social services review and its effect on hundreds of thousands of claimants, be they old, young, unemployed, sick or disabled. This aspect is part of the general debate about the DHSS and the legislation's effects on the appeal system.

The Government have ignored all the approaches made by every strand of society—the churches, the voluntary sector and citizens advice bureaux. The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) has said that the CAB was infiltrated by a bunch of Trots—the sort of statement that we begin to expect from the more reactionary Conservative Members. The Government cannot be persuaded to listen to anyone on the results of the changes in the Social Security Act and in the appeals procedure.

The appeals machinery in the DHSS has been in crisis for a long time. Some people have waited as long as nine months for their appeal to be heard. Everyone should recognise that there is something radically wrong with a system that was designed to give claimants the opportunity to appeal against DHSS decisions and have their appeal heard by an independent body, so that they were seen to get a fair deal and their entitlements under the regulations.

I shall refer to two cases out of many. Mrs. Maher applied for a dietary addition and her case began in September 1977. I wrote to the Secretary of State and to Judge Byrt, the president of the social security appeal tribunals, and her case was eventually heard later in the year,. During the eight months she waited for the case to be heard, she was denied the dietary additions to keep her well and she lost two stone.

Mr. Doyle's case started in June 1987 and was heard in February this year, after constant correspondence with the DHSS and the Secretary of State. That is an indictment of the DHSS procedures, which should make access available to appeal tribunals so that claimants' cases are heard within a reasonable time of their application being submitted.

There are two DHSS offices in my constituency—the Garston office and the Childwall Valley office. So that the House will not think that I have picked out two particular cases, I shall recite the list of cases sent to me by the CAB in February this year:

"T1944 Client applied for mobility allowance on 1.7.87., claim disallowed on 22.7.87. Appealed 14.8.87. tribunal listed for 10.2.88. 6 month wait.

T919 Appeal against overpayment. Appeal received by the DHSS 25.3.86 tribunal been adjourned several times by DHSS to obtain more evidence. Still no date for hearing. Client very anxious over accusation from DHSS which was carried on nearly 2 years.

T1704 Appeal adjourned on 10.7.87 because client was too ill to attend still no date listed for new appeal. 6 months.

T1927 Appeal received 22.5.87. hearing listed for 26.1.88., adjourned because of incomplete tribunal—already 9 months.

T1926 Appeal received 29.5.87. appeal listed for 16.9.87 (5 months) but tribunal adjourned because papers sent to wrong address, next hearing listed for 26.1.88., 8 months total . . .

T1754 Appeal received by DHSS on 9.10.86. date of appeal list 28.7.87. (9 months). This was for a cooker, an essential item. Papers again sent to wrong address, new appeal set for 8.1.88. 1 year 2 months later."

If Ministers try to defend and justify such delays, which affect the most vulnerable sections of our society, it will give us an even clearer indication of the Government's lack of consideration and concern for the poor and the weak in our society. It is an absolute scandal that Ministers have made excuses and criticised the take-up campaigns launched by the welfare rights people in an attempt to ensure that claimants knew their entitlements and that they were properly represented.

When I complained about the delays, I received a letter from the local office of the DHSS saying that it was due to the backlog of appeals. On the question of single payments, it is significant to note that in a period of 18 months the budget was more or less halved from £390 million to £150 million. That may well be one of the reasons for the delays in hearing appeals. I am convinced that the Government have used delays as a ploy do deprive claimants of their rights. They have elongated the period of appeals so that the claimants are caught by the new regulations. It is an absolute scandal that the DHSS should be placed in that position because the Government are not prepared to make the trained additional staff available to deal with the so-called backlog of appeals.

It is significant, too, that the president of the appeal tribunals, Judge Byrt, to whom I wrote about two of the cases to which I have referred, said of the statistics that he set out in his long report:

"I would not however wish anyone to think that I or anyone in the Social Security Appeal Tribunals is not concerned about the misery and hardship lying behind the facts."

In spite of what the statistics say about the undoubted increase in the number of appeals being lodged, they disguise the fact that in Liverpool, for example, there are pockets where appeals have increased by about 85 per cent. Those appeals have been the subject of long delays. It is no wonder, therefore, that Judge Byrt in his reply should abrogate responsibility for the hardship and misery caused by the delays. He makes it clear that the statistics ought to be looked at and that the delays in the appeals system should be considered by the Department because of the misery caused to people.

We know that much of the DHSS appeal system will be ended by new regulations and that appeals will no longer be possible over single payments. In many cases those payments are important to people who have to claim for additional items either on the birth of a baby or on getting

[Mr. Eddie Loyden]

a council flat for the first time. I have had cases in my constituency of people applying for bed and bedding who have had to lie on the floor while waiting for the decision of an appeals tribunal. In this dynamic economy of 1988, that is the sort of situation that arises in patches in this country of popular capitalism. That is constantly ignored by the Government.

Today we have seen evidence of the uncaring nature of the Conservative party and its complete disregard of the people who are appealing to it. The Government have completely disregarded those who have constantly warned them that the pressure placed on these people will eventually reach the point at which it will explode in the Government's face. The sooner that that happens the better, because the Government listen to nothing and in all probability only direct action by people will shift them.

The Government have not become complacent: they have become arrogant and believe that everything that they say has been written on tablets of stone. They bring legislation to the House and no Conservative Member dares to oppose it or contest what the Government are doing to the poorer people in our society. Conservative Members know that week after week they hear in their surgeries and at meetings complaints of the kind that I have outlined. They know what is going on, because they must see it in their constituencies. It is a disgrace that when the Government are being criticised Conservative Members can sit on the Benches and disregard the opportunity to do something to help.

Between 1974 and 1979 I did not fear to go into the Lobby against the then Labour Government when I thought that they were wrong. It is about time that more Conservative Members recognised that many of the things done by the Government deserve to be called wicked by the people who say that the Government are composed of wicked people. I have illustrated what will ensue as a result of the policies being pursued by the Government against the poor and, in particular, the elderly.

Today I received a letter from a 94-year-old woman who tells me that her benefit has been cut to £39 a week. She has no idea why it has been cut, and at the age of 94 no one would expect her to have. She does not understand what is going on. Can any Conservative Member, or can the Minister, justify that cut to a 94-year-old woman? How can I or the Minister answer her?

Time and again the Government were warned that such cases would emerge. I have had another letter from a 78-year-old woman faced with a similar situation. Such letters will pour into the House in the coming months. Members of all parties will receive letters from constituents who do not understand why a country that claims to be, and still is, one of the world's richest can treat its old, its sick and its poor in such a way.

It is the responsibility of the Minister not to roll out a litany of figures and tell us the cause of this, that and the other, but to say that the cases that I have outlined are only the tip of the iceberg. He should say that they will not continue to be dealt with in the way that they have been dealt with in the past.

I want an assurance from the Minister that no staff cuts in the DHSS will result from the fact that the appeals system will no longer apply to single payments. There are plenty of empty offices in every major town and city that could be used to help to speed up the appeals system generally. There is no excuse for the Government's complacency. I hope that the Minister will respond positively and ensure that there is immediate action to end the misery and hardship of hundreds of thousands of people.

10.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Michael Portillo): I listened with great care to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden), despite his remark about the Government not listening. The hon. Gentleman has raised a matter of great concern both to me and to His Honour Judge Byrt, who is the president of the social security and medical appeal tribunals.

At the outset, I wish to make it quite clear that I wholeheartedly agree that the delays experienced by appellants in some parts of the country must be reduced. I shall outline the measures being taken both by the DHSS and by Judge Byrt to overcome the present problems. Before doing so, I remind the hon. Gentleman that in 1984 we established an independent body to administer all social security appeals, not just those for supplementary benefit. The creation of an independent administration has been seen, both in this House and outside it, as a very positive step.

On the problem of delays, in Great Britain the average time for a case to get to a hearing from the lodging of an appeal has steadily increased over the past four years from 12·9 weeks in the second quarter of 1984 to 20·3 weeks in the second quarter of 1987. Those are the latest available figures. Almost certainly it is now longer than that in some parts of the country. The reason lies in the marked increase in the number of appeals. In Great Britain in the second quarter of 1984, 72,000 social security appeals were made, while by the second quarter of 1987 the equivalent figure was 176,000. That represents an increase of 144 per cent. over the four-year period. Appeals against decisions on supplementary benefit, both the weekly benefit and single payments, have increased by 62 per cent. over the same period, from 62,000 to 100,000.

The number of claims to benefit, and especially single payments, have increased markedly over the period and the number of appeals is partly a reflection of that. In addition, the whole process of the social security reviews leading up to the Green and White Papers and the changes brought about by the Social Security Act 1986, have put and kept social security very much in the public eye. There have been numerous take-up campaigns throughout the country that have encouraged people to apply for their possible entitlements to benefit. Such campaigns cannot always be accurately targeted and, as a result, more people have had claims refused. Therefore, more appeals are likely.

It will be clear to the hon. Gentleman that both social security local offices and the tribunals have been under increasing pressures in recent years, and we have sought to respond to that broadly in three ways. First, on structure, we have taken steps to adapt the social security system to the needs of the 1990s. The introduction of income support this April should simplify the system for all concerned. In particular, the replacement of the present system of single payments with the new social fund, which will provide grants and offer interest-free loans both to people in

receipt of income support and otherwise and have its own system of reviews, should result in a very considerable easing of the burden on the social security appeal system.

Single payments amount to almost 40 per cent. of all appeals, so their removal will ease administration in the president's office and in the DHSS. The cost of an appeal is about £200, which is far higher than the value of single payments, which average about £80. The new system of income support will be far simpler for staff to administer and for claimants to understand. Neither the local offices nor the tribunals will have to deal with the vast number of expensive appeals for relatively small amounts.

By those structural means, it is expected that the over-burdened tribunals will, by the end of the year, have a more manageable work load. I therefore disagree with the hon. Gentleman's remarks as reported in the *Liverpool Echo:*

"The benefit system is in crisis and things are going to get much worse when the new social security system comes into operation in April."

The opposite effect is likely to occur.

Secondly, among the improvements, we have sought to ensure that the social security offices and the tribunals have more staff to carry out their tasks. Thus, the element of social security local office staffing that is allocated for appeals work has been increased between 1984-85 and 1987-88, while the administrative staff of the president's office increased from 427 to 709 over the same period. Special efforts are currently being made by thre president to reduce delays. His staffing requirements have been met in full for the next six months to help to achieve that end, and, in the autumn of this year, a further staffing review will take place, with a view to achieving further significant reductions in delay.

Thirdly, we have sought to improve the administrative procedures for handling appeals within the DHSS. A DHSS central management services team has recently completed a study of procedures for appeals work in central, regional and local social security offices. Because of my awareness of the concern of hon. Members over appeal delays, I have arranged for copies of that report of be made available in the Library. Each of the recommendations of the report has been carefully considered, and a programme for implementation of those that are agreed will shortly be drawn up.

It is relevant also to refer to the operational strategy, which is the term used for the computerisation of social security benefits. The plan to computerise the assessment and payment of income support is on course for implementation over the coming years. That will simplify the administration of income support by improving the accuracy of initial assessments and the quality of explanations to claimants. Such improvements should thereby help to reduce the number of appeals.

However, as I said, the major problem for the tribunal system has been the marked increase in the volume of appeals in the last year or so. While within a social security office the manager has scope to redeploy his staff to meet changing work patterns, I am aware that that is not the case for the presidential organisation, in which all administrative staff are solely concerned with servicing appeals.

As the president administers a wholly independent organisation, it would be wrong for me to speak here on his behalf. However, as the hon. Gentleman well knows, Judge Byrt has written a constructive statement that sets out the practical difficulties presently facing his organisation and the steps that he is taking to overcome them. I have already placed a copy of his statement in the Library so that all hon. Members may have the opportunity of reading it. However, it might be helpful if I quote some extracts from it, although I readily admit that I am quoting selectively, because the hon. Gentleman and others have the whole letter to refer to.

In the early part of the letter there is a narrative on how the problems of the SSAT have built up. However, the narrative ends on an optimistic note. Between August 1987 and the end of the year, the number of tribunals held and cases cleared has steadily increased, mainly as the result of the arrival of a new influx of staff, recruited and trained in the summer months, following their nominal allocation to OPSSAT on 1 April 1987. The monthly session rate has increased from 3,558 in July to 4,478 in December; and the figure for cases cleared has risen from 15,740 to 18,803.

The three smaller regions in the south and south-west have now reduced their waiting time to an average nine weeks; with fine tuning, this period can be reduced still further. Each of the four bigger regions in the north of England and Scotland have begun to make appreciable inroads into their backlog. The main disadvantage they suffer is the size of that backlog, which hangs round their necks like the proverbial albatross and slows them down.

Judge Byrt set out some of the achievements of the OPSSAT, which are worth recording. Between July 1986 and December 1987, the number of sessions increased from 2,730 to 4,478, the number of cases cleared increased from 10,135 to 18,803, and the staff increased from 527 to 709. Judge Byrt commented that the figures reflected the enhanced efficiency of an organisation bedded down and familiar with its work. Although delay is currently running at an overall figure of 19 weeks, this is now on an improving curve, having peaked in July at about 21 weeks.

The conclusion of his letter is:

"OPSSAT is committed to doing what it can to improve the position on tribunal delays in any way it can. In this, the organisation is supported by a staff whose morale is sustained by the belief that they are fulfilling a positive and worthwhile serve in the community. It is difficult to assess the time when that service will be restored to the standards which OPSSAT was created to achieve. The Spring and Summer of this year may yet hold surprises for us. My estimate is that November 1988 will see the improvements we all seek and I believe that to be a realistic expectation."

The hon. Gentleman will know, too, that Judge Byrt has a series of comments to make about the specific problems in Liverpool. He has ensured that as much work as possible should be transferred away from Liverpool to relieve the burden of the appeals that are actually being heard in Liverpool. Southport supplementary benefit appeals, for example, are now being heard by the Southport tribunal instead of in Liverpool. It is hoped that the Skelmersdale work can be sent to Wigan. Obviously, those measures will help Liverpool. Judge Byrt concludes by stating:

"I have every expectation of heavy inroads into the Liverpool arrears by September."

I very much share that hope.

Mr. Loyden: The Minister will have discovered from that correspondence that I have raised the matters on numerous occasions, both with regional organisations and with the president of the appeal tribunals. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that those long delays in the local area could well have been overcome by opening up additional

[Mr. Loyden]

offices in the area? Approaches made by the CAB and myself fell on deaf ears when it came to opening new offices in order that procedures could be speeded up.

Mr. Portillo: I know that the hon. Gentleman has paid careful attention to the correspondence, so he will know that the problem that is being dealt with. In Liverpool, the appeals load accelerated from just 639 cases in August 1986 to 1,509 in December 1986. With the best will in the world, that was a very rapid rate of increase for anybody to be asked to deal with.

However, as I said to the hon. Gentleman at the beginning of the debate, I am not here to tell him that there is not a problem. I agree that there is a problem, and it is one that we very much wish to address. I want him to appreciate that within the DHSS and the OPSSAT the problems are being addressed with great vigour.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 19 April 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Buildings

1. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent assessment his Department has made of the effect on educational standards of sub-standard school buildings.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Bob Dunn): Many factors may affect the educational standards achieved in schools and there is no reliable means of identifying the contribution made by any one in particular. Local education authorities are responsible for ensuring that school buildings are maintained at an appropriate standard.

Mr. Pike: Is it not a fact that the Department's own inspectors have said that sub-standard buildings often have an adverse effect on the working conditions and education of our children? Is it not a fact also that the Department's own survey showed that £2 billion is needed by 1991 to put our schools in accessible order? When will the Government tackle this problem and put it right?

Mr. Dunn: I may point out to the hon. Gentleman that £319 million was allocated for capital works in schools in 1988-89—26 per cent. more than in 1987-88. Taking account of capital receipts and other flexibilities, authorities' total national spending power in 1988-89 was £3·6 billion, which should enable many to start getting to grips with the problems to which the hon. Gentleman has referred.

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend's interest in this matter is considerable, and it is understandable and genuine. Can he tell the House whether he has had any success in persuading his colleagues to make more funds available to voluntary-aided schools to improve their buildings? I remind my hon. Friend of a visit that he made to my constituency and to St. Austin's and St. Marie's schools, and he may recall the condition of those schools. Can he hold out any hope of improving their condition reasonably soon?

Mr. Dunn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. I remember with great clarity and affection the visit that I made to his constituency.

In response to the first part of his question I can tell him and the House that allocations to voluntary-aided schools for capital projects totalled £55·3 million in 1988-89—an increase of 38 per cent. over the figure for 1987-88. As a result, 32 major improvement and replacement projects are due to start.

Mr. Ashdown: The Government recognise the implications of sub-standard buildings; hence the 1981 building regulations. However, unhappily they prevent local education authorities from doing anything about the situation by limiting their funds and loading other legal requirements on to them. I understand that if Somerset county council, for instance, were to fulfil its legal obligations for special needs, it would not be able to spend any more on decent school buildings. Does the Minister recognise that probably not one LEA in the country can meet the requirements of the 1981 building regulations by the time limits set? What will the Government do? Will they simply wash their hands and say, "It is nothing to do with us"?

Mr. Dunn: I am grateful to the hon. Member for the moderate way in which he phrased his question. I remind him that it is for local education authorities to ensure that schools are properly maintained. The Government have made additional resources available to local education authorities—a fact which I am sure the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) will welcome.

Mr. Batiste: On the subject of the fabric of schools, does my hon. Friend recall the concern that I expressed in Committee on the Education Reform Bill about the incompetence of the Leeds education authority? Has he had a chance to read the letter from Councillor John Illingworth that I gave him this week? Does that letter not confirm my fears, and will my hon. Friend ask the schools inspectorate to launch an efficiency audit into the running of the authority?

Mr. Dunn: I am sure that my hon. Friend's point will be noted by the schools inspectorate. I have received a copy of the letter sent by Councillor John Illingworth to his colleague, another Labour councillor, Councillor B. Walker. Councillor Illingworth had this to say:

"Faced with this situation"—

that is, school repairs and refurbishment—

"the Group seems to have three stock responses:—

1. Blame Mrs. Thatcher.
2. Blame the Officers.
3. Blame George Mudie.

I am not sure in which order! I would like to suggest a fourth alternative: that the Group and the Party as a whole are collectively responsible for a situation which, even if it cannot be completely cured, could at least be made substantially better than it is at the moment."

The councillor goes on to say:

"I do not believe"—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I appeal for brief questions and briefer answers today.

Education Reform

2. **Mr. Allan Roberts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to publish in full the details of his proposed national curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): The Government's proposals are set out in the Education Reform Bill now before Parliament.

Mr. Roberts: When the Secretary of State publishes his proposed national curriculum, will he take account of the views expressed yesterday in the other place by Lord Joseph, that the present proposals represent too tight a straitjacket and that teachers will be testing pupils on too

many subjects, which will not allow time for other important subjects in the curriculum? If the Secretary of State cannot convince the Prime Minister of his view on the matter, is she likely to listen to the person whose protegée she was?

Mrs. Rumbold: I listened very carefully to the words of my right hon. and noble Friend in the other place yesterday afternoon, and I noted his concern about those children who fall into categories of lower attainment than the high fliers. I am certain, however, that as the debate proceeds in the other place and my right hon. and noble Friend learns the details proposed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, he will find and respond to the breadth and balance proposed in the national curriculum, and note the differentiation proposed by my right hon. Friend in the testing and attainment targets.

Sir Peter Emery: When my hon. Friend publishes the national curriculum, will she draw the attention of school authorities to the desire of many people that schools should start the day in assembly or class, with a short Christian service—such as we have in the House of Commons, perhaps—featuring a prayer, a Bible reading, the Lord's Prayer and, if possible, the singing of a hymn?

Mrs. Rumbold: I welcome my hon. Friend's comments and note his views. There has been considerable consultation and discussion with the Churches and with all the local authorities and others involved on the whole issue of school assembly. As far as possible, the Churches and the schools were agreed that some form of assembly should take place in schools. It is not always possible for such an assembly to start at the beginning of the day, however desirable that might be, but I am sure that those schools that can do so will take note of my hon. Friend's comments.

Mr. Beggs: Does the Minister recognise that attainment testing of children of seven, eight, 11, 14 and 16 will place an increasing burden on classroom teachers? Will she endeavour to reduce the class contact hours worked by those teachers, to ensure that there is proper time not only for marking attainment tests but for preparing adequate pupil profile records? Finally, is it not time that more emphasis was placed on diagnostic testing throughout a pupil's school career, with the necessary remedial teaching?

Mrs. Rumbold: I would commend to the hon. Gentleman Professor Paul Black's initial and interim report on testing and attainment targets. If and when he reads it, he will see that the report speaks extensively about the importance of testing. He will also note that much of what is being suggested is practice that is already being carried out with children in the classroom. The work being done on attainment targets will satisfy many people's queries and concerns about it.

We are anxious that the work on records and profiles of achievement, which has been initiated in the schools, should continue and that teachers should find ample time to do it.

Mr. Raison: Bearing in mind the admirable interest of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in English history, will my hon. Friend give an undertaking that if there is a move in another place to promote history to join the three core subjects in the curriculum, the Government will respond sympathetically to it?

Mrs. Rumbold: I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend has also read Lord Joseph's speech, in which he made a special plea for British history, but I must leave these matters to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I assure hon. Members on both sides of the House that we shall expect the working group on history to look at British history and give due weight and attention to it when it comes to setting up attainment targets.

Mr. Straw: Is the Minister aware that her arrogant dismissal of Lord Joseph's view, coming from one who lacks understanding, will do no more for the reputation of Ministers than yesterday's performance on the poll tax? How will Ministers meet Lord Joseph's view that the national curriculum is a straitjacket and too prescriptive?

Mrs. Rumbold: The hon. Gentleman is much mistaken. Far from being arrogant about my noble Friend's remarks in another place yesterday, I listened to them with care and attention and got no impression that he was anything but highly supportive of the Government's proposals in all their measures. He voiced one or two concerns and we shall certainly take note of them.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Will my hon. Friend reassure Lord Joseph that children are stressed by tests only if they are excessively formally conducted and unrelated to work that they have been doing? Will she also assure the House and Lord Joseph that tests for children will be closely related to their curriculum and conducted in an informal atmosphere?

Mrs. Rumbold: Yes, I am confident of that, and I assure my hon. Friend that it will be so.

General Certificate of Secondary Education

3. **Mr. McWilliam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on Her Majesty's inspectors' report on the introduction of the general certificate of secondary education; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Baker): None, Sir. The report provides reassuring evidence that the GCSE is being successfully introduced and is already leading to better teaching and learning in many schools.

Mr. McWilliam: Is the Secretary of State aware of the great anxiety of many parents who, like me, have children who are guinea pigs in this examination this year, over the level of resourcing for the introduction of the GCSE? If he could not get the money from the Treasury this year that he needed to finance it properly, would it not have been better to phase it in over two or three years with the same resources?

Mr. Baker: I got quite a lot of money out of the Treasury for the GCSE. The amount that was specifically provided in the year that has just ended was £115 million—the estimated amount spent on introducing the examination—and in the current year it amounts to £102 million. That is being spent on teacher training, textbooks and resources of that sort.

Sir Dudley Smith: Does my right hon. Friend recall that when the change was made years ago from school certificate and matriculation it was done smoothly and without rancour? Is there any reason why the current change should not go through just as smoothly, allowing for political prejudice?

Mr. Baker: I remember the change. I was one of the last of the cohort who took the old school certificate examinations. I thought that it was a good examination. As I did well in it I was rather attached to it. I understand that a change in an examination system is important. The planning for the GCSE started more than 10 years ago and the decision to go ahead with it was taken four years ago. A great deal of planning has gone into it, and I am glad that the inspectors think that it is settling in smoothly.

Mr. Watts: Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that examining boards are making adequate provision for children who suffer from dyslexia, in particular by permitting them to have teachers to read papers to them, without which facility they are placed under a severe handicap?

Mr. Baker: I think that every examining board makes allowance for that. I am specifically asking the working groups on the national curriculum to ensure that they take into account children with special needs.

Mr. Fatchett: The Secretary of State will know that the Labour party has been fulsome in its support in principle for the GCSE examination and that it still holds that position. Will he deal with two matters that are worrying parents? First, they are worried that the additional assessment and case work will impose great strains upon children and lead to a squeeze in the number of subjects that children may wish to take. Secondly, they are worried that the extra work may impose additional burdens upon teachers. There are suggestions that there is a need for 5,000 additional teachers. Those are real worries. Will the Secretary of State try to put some of them to rest?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman spoke about extra teachers. This year there has been a continuing improvement in the pupil:teacher ratio, and it is planned to be 17:1 in 1989. That allows some flexibility.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about children being stretched in the assessment work. There is some evidence of this. I am not too worried about children having to work a bit harder for their examinations, but I accept that it is important that they should not be overstreched. The general evidence is that this examination is going very well. One of the interesting things that we have discovered in talking to heads and to children is that, as a result of the type of teaching that goes with the GCSE, more children are now deciding to opt to stay on at school post-16. That is one of the unconvenanted blessings of this examination.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the considerable concern that has been expressed by history teachers about the examination syllabuses and the examinations in the history curriculum? Will he arrange at the end of the first year of the GCSE for Her Majesty's Inspectorate to report on how the examination has gone?

Mr. Baker: I am sure that Her Majesty's Inspectorate will do that. It is for the inspectorate to decide and it will almost certainly decide to do that. I assure my hon. Friend that I am also concerned about a particular aspect of history, and I shall be seeing the joint council of the GCSE examining groups in May to discuss progress.

Higher Education

4. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what discussions he has held with local authorities about the provision and resourcing of access courses to higher education; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Robert Jackson): My right hon. Friend has not discussed this issue with local authorities. It is for each authority and for the appropriate institutions to consider how to secure adequate provision of access courses in its area. In this connection I note that the number of access courses has more than trebled over the last three years.

Mr. Marshall: Does the Minister agree that there will be genuine concern about the future of access courses once the new funding arrangements for polytechnics and colleges of higher education come into being? To encourage people to break the cycle of educational deprivation, particularly among women, older people and ethnic minorities, will he give a categorical assurance that access quotas will continue and that funding will be guaranteed by local authorities and by the Government?

Mr. Jackson: The Government share the hon. Gentleman's desire for the widening of educational opportunity, and we have a good record of success in this sphere. The participation of mature students has increased by 32 per cent. since 1979, and the participation of part-time students in higher education has increased by 31 per cent. since 1979. The proportion of women in higher education has risen from 38 per cent. in 1979 to 42 per cent. in 1986.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Does the Minister agree that his White Paper of 12 months ago set out the Government's commitment to more access for mature students? What initiatives have the Government taken in the past 12 months to encourage access by mature students? Does he agree that all the talk about loans to students does a great deal to put off mature students from the thought of going into higher education? Many of them are already worried about debts for housing and other things, and they would be completely put off if loans were on the agenda.

Mr. Jackson: As the hon. Gentleman knows, discussion about access quotas and the provision of access is a rising theme in the university and higher education world. The Government are encouraging that in discussions with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom and with the Committee of Directors of Polytechnics. The hon. Gentleman spoke about loans. The basic fact that we must recognise is that our very expensive system of grants—the most expensive in the Western world—has not delivered very substantial access. Only 6 per cent. of university entrants came from social classes 4 and 5 in 1979, and it rose to only 8·1 per cent. in 1986. That is an increase over the period of office of the Government, but the figure is still low and it suggests that the grants system is not delivering access.

Mr. Ian Bruce: When considering the question of people going forward to higher education, has my hon. Friend considered the A-level syllabuses? The GCSE is taking students very much towards university and the type of study that they would do there. A-levels are now rather out of line with that. Have any studies been made on that?

Mr. Jackson: As my hon. Friend knows, a committee under the chairmanship of the vice chancellor of

Southampton university is considering the future of A-levels. Meanwhile, I should draw my hon. Friend's attention to the introduction by the Government of the AS-level, which we hope will be more widely used and will have the beneficial effects for which my hon. Friend hopes.

Teachers

5. **Mr. Ashdown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on teacher recruitment in national curriculum core and foundation subjects.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Recruits to initial teacher training in all subjects, including the national curriculum core and foundation subjects, were well up last year. Allocations to initial teacher training from 1990 and our energetic campaign of recruitment will both focus on the teachers' needs of the national curriculum.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Secretary of State agree with the Black report that proper assessment and testing in line with its recommendations, as against the crude snapshot tests preferred and favoured by the Prime Minister, will require more time for training and assessment and, therefore, less contact time with pupils? Does he accept that that will have an inevitable consequence for the pupil:teacher ratios required to deliver the national curriculum? Will he undertake to consider that matter fully when producing the figures on the number of teachers required to deliver the national curriculum, which was promised to me by the Minister of State three months ago?

Mr. Baker: A review is being carried out on secondary staffing, but we are broadly satisfied that there are sufficient teachers within the system to deliver the national curriculum, bearing in mind that there will be a drop in secondary pupils of 280,000 over the next three years and that the school population at secondary level will not be up to this year's level again until the year 2000. We believe, therefore, that, with proper retraining and in-service training, we will be able to meet the needs of the national curriculum.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Does my right hon. Friend agree that teacher recruitment involves meeting a shortage of teachers in some subjects and a surplus in others? Does he also agree with Sir George Porter, president of the Royal Society, who last week said that the way to solve that problem was through a regional form of bargaining, even down to local authority level, for teachers' salaries, rather than through a nationally-based union?

Mr. Baker: That raises very wide questions, but I agree with my hon. Friend that there is a shortage in certain key subjects—mathematics, physics and craft, design and technology. There was a substantial increase last year in the number of teachers training in those shortage subjects. For example, in CDT and business studies there was an increase of 21 and 19 per cent., and there has been an increase in the number of teachers training in mathematics and physics. That is part of our thrust, because they are key subjects.

Mr. Duffy: Is the Secretary of State aware of the persisting fears, as revealed during the last few days, of the Catholic bishops of England and Wales that his Bill threatens the Catholic schools system? The bishops are especially anxious that the national curriculum should make provision to enable teachers and the governors of voluntary schools to preserve and develop the distinctive ethos and character of their schools.

Mr. Baker: I can give the hon. Gentleman an absolute assurance on that. We want to ensure that the particular ethos of Church schools, whether Catholic, Anglican, Jewish or of other faiths, is preserved. We also want to ensure that religious education is taught in the non-Church schools, and we shall bring forward amendments in the other place to ensure that religious education is part of the basic curriculum, standing alongside the foundation and core subjects, primus inter pares.

Mr. Key: When does my right hon. Friend expect to be able to publish the report of the interim advisory committee on teachers' pay?

Mr. Baker: I received the interim advisory committee's report on 31 March. I shall publish it later today, together with my proposals, as a basis for consultation. It is a long, detailed report, and I know that hon. Members will find it very interesting. The next step is to ensure that we enter into the consultations required under the Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1987 with the teacher unions, local authority associations and the Churches.

Mrs. Clwyd: The Secretary of State is being particularly complacent in glossing over the serious difficulties facing schools in the shortage subjects. Why, according to the latest figures obtained yesterday from the central register and clearing house, are there significant shortfalls in applicants for the postgraduate certificate of education course, which starts in the autumn, compared with last year? In mathematics the number of applicants is down by 17 per cent., in physics by 20 per cent., in biology by 18 per cent. and in modern languages by 12 to 13 per cent. Surely that is a very serious situation.

Mr. Baker: We are not in the least complacent. We have not finished computing the cycle of recruiting. We had a large advertising programme in March to encourage people to apply for teaching training, and overall there is an increase of about 3 per cent. in applications over last year—and last year was an exceptionally good year.

Mr. Paice: In view of my right hon. Friend's statement about the shortage of mathematics and some science subject teachers, will he redouble his efforts to draw into the teaching fraternity people who have had a career either in the services or in industry, so that we can add their tremendous experience to the pool of wealth?

Mr. Baker: I support what my hon. Friend has said. We have a scheme to encourage people who have experience in industry, commerce or the services and who wish to change their careers, because they have a great deal to offer. If they have an aptitude for teaching they can draw upon their experience and also upon their maturity, which are valuable assets in a teacher.

Task Group on Assessment and Testing

6. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects the Task Group on Assessment and Testing to publish its final report; and if he will make a statement.

15. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects the Task Group on Assessment and Testing to publish its final report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My Department has just received the further advice I requested from the task group, and expect to publish it in due course, when I have completed my consideration of it.

Ms. Armstrong: Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to clear up a confusion? Is it the Government's view that testing is formative and diagnostic, as the Black report recommends, or is it the Government's view that it is summative, as the Prime Minister suggests?

Mr. Baker: If the hon. Lady reads the Black report, she will note that in some of its paragraphs it is quite scathing about the misuse of diagnostic testing. The very fact that the Black report also recognises that the results of assessment and testing, particularly testing, should be published means that that is a summative use of the results of testing and assessment.

Mr. Michael: Is not the report of the task force at variance with the crude form of measurement favoured by the Prime Minister? Does the Secretary of State agree with the comments made by Lord Joseph in the other place, and will he reassure us that he will not create a testing industry, which would divert resources from the important task of education?

Mr. Baker: If we have a national curriculum and attainment targets at seven, 11, 14 and 16, which is the system which we shall have, and which has received support from both sides of the House, we shall have to assess and test the children. This is what teachers need to do, what pupils want, and what parents want to know. They want to know the answer to the question, "How is my child doing at a particular age against national criteria?" That is what we shall provide.

Mr. Latham: I warmly welcome the practical, commonsense approach of the Black report, but will my right hon. Friend confirm that it remains his view and that of his Ministers that the results of any testing at seven should be known only to the parents, the head and the class teacher?

Mr. Baker: The Black report made it clear that there should be assessment and testing at seven, but that it would be unfair to the school and the child to publish those results. I have already expressed my considerable sympathy with that approach. Seven is too early an age at which to make judgments, because children come in at different ages and have had different levels of experience of teaching.

Mr. Sackville: Are not some of those teachers who criticise assessment on the grounds that it will expose children of ethnic backgrounds to unfair competition failing to help those children, and even possibly damaging their future prospects?

Mr. Baker: I agree with my hon. Friend. I have been impressed by the number of parents of ethnic children who are insistent that their children are taught the basics and should know exactly where they stand. I look upon that as a reinforcement of basic standards in our schools.

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State will recall that in the private letter which the Prime Minister's private secretary sent his private secretary in January, the Prime Minister expressed great concern about the "very large cost" of implementing the Black report. Has the Secretary of State yet reached any views about the total costs of testing? If so, what are they? Do the answers on testing that he has given this afternoon have the support of the Prime Minister?

Mr. Baker: I am quite sure that they do—*[Interruption.]* I might confirm it by letter. The hon. Gentleman knows well that I, too, expressed anxiety in Committee about the complexity of an assessment and testing scheme. It must not be so complex that it bears down on the administration of the school. I am also concerned about the cost. As I have told the hon. Gentleman, we have received further documents from Professor Black's group. We asked him particularly to address these points. I shall publish those documents in due course.

Teaching as a Second Career

7. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he is satisfied with the progress to date of the teaching as a second career campaign.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department's campaign to improve teacher recruitment, including the most recent initiatives of the teaching as a career unit and the London exhibition, have proved successful. In May we are holding a conference in London between top industrialists and educationalists to see how we can reduce teacher shortages with the help of industry.

Mr. Evennett: I thank my hon. Friend for her reply and congratulate the Government on their efforts to get more teachers into schools. However, is my hon. Friend satisfied that there are enough candidates coming forward from industry to go into teaching, particularly those with science or technology talents and skills? Is there anything further that can be done to encourage more people with those backgrounds and interests to go into teaching?

Mrs. Rumbold: We share my hon. Friend's anxiety to get more mature people into the teaching profession, especially those with the skills of science and technology. As a result of the advertising campaign to which my right hon. Friend referred just now we have had a most encouraging response from about 14,500 people, about half of whom are mature people. We hope that a number of mature entrants with that sort of experience will come into the teaching profession.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Like the Minister, we appreciate the need for this campaign to be successful, but can the hon. Lady assure us that the national curriculum will not be introduced until local authorities have confirmed with the Government that there are sufficient qualified teachers to teach all subjects in the national curriculum?

Mrs. Rumbold: The hon. Gentleman knows that it is very important for us to begin to introduce the national curriculum as soon as possible. It is therefore our intention, once the working groups on mathematics and science have reported, that those reports should be consulted upon and that the process of putting an order before the House should begin. Thereafter, we intend that children in primary schools will start to study mathematics and science under the national curriculum. The same will be true of English and technology, as the working groups are set up.

The hon. Gentleman asked about teacher numbers. He will be very pleased to know that recruitment for primary sector teaching has increased by 10 per cent. this year.

Universities and Polytechnics

8. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what priority he attaches to the role of universities and polytechnics in regional development.

Mr. Jackson: As national institutions, our universities, polytechnics and colleges have an important part to play in regional development by providing high quality education and training, by undertaking research and developing close links with industry.

Mr. Cran: In the light of that answer, does my hon. Friend agree that it is indeed a strange decision by the University Grants Committee to recommend the closure of the geology department at the University of Hull, precisely because of the amount of help it gives to industry, attested to by the fact that Yorkshire and Humberside CBI has written to say exactly that? Can my hon. Friend find some inventive way of giving a signal to the UGC that it has taken a wrong decision?

Mr. Jackson: The basic purpose of the subject rationalisation exercises that are being undertaken by the UGC is to strengthen provision nationally for teaching and research. We wish to strengthen it academically by concentrating on centres of excellence, and financially by deploying our resources in the most clearly targeted way. In such a process there will always be gainers and losers, and the losers will always dispute the criteria. Under the constitutional arrangements in this area the criteria are for the UGC to determine. With regard to regional interests, one of the half dozen major earth sciences centres projected by UGC will be in Leeds, which is not far away.

Dr. Thomas: Will the Minister explain why the gainers tend to be in the south-east of England for higher education research as well as for other areas of public policy? Will he ensure that our new university research centres are geographically spread throughout the nations and regions of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Jackson: I am sure that the UGC will rightly wish to continue to pursue a United Kingdom national policy in the allocation of its resources and that it will look for the areas of best advantage in terms of academic quality for the development of its research centres and for the deployment of its research resources.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: My hon. Friend will know that Nottingham is central to the east midlands region and that the city proudly possesses two distinguished places of higher education, Nottingham university and Trent polytechnic, the latter, of course, looking forward with great eagerness to independence under the coming legislation. Given Trent polytechnic's strong commercial and industrial links and the rapid growth of the science park at Nottingham university, will my hon. Friend bear in mind the role of the Queen of the Midlands in any discussions that his Department has on a regional technology centre?

Mr. Jackson: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the good work done by Trent polytechnic and Nottingham university and I shall certainly take note of his suggestion.

Mr. Madden: Will the Minister confirm that Bradford and Ilkley college is making a major contribution to the local and regional economy and enjoys widespread support, including that of local business, and will he find time to visit it before late September or early October? Will he also arrange to make an early statement to remove entirely the college's uncertainty about its long-term funding?

Mr. Jackson: I am undertaking an extensive tour of visits to universities and colleges up and down the land, and only last week I was in that area. I shall certainly take note of the hon. Gentleman's suggestion and look into the possibility of visiting the college.

Children (Special Needs)

9. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on his Department's provision for those children assessed as having special needs.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced last November that the Government would be providing for local education authorities to spend nearly £13·9 billion on education in 1988-89. Within this figure a sum is being provided for special schools. It is for local education authorities to determine whether children have special educational needs and to secure appropriate provision for them within the terms of the Education Act 1981.

Mr. Amess: Does my hon. Friend recognise the anxiety felt by some parents, who believe that their children are not making the sort of progress at school that they would have hoped and that local education authorities also take some time to recognise that fact? Does he agree that provisions in the Education Reform Bill requiring testing will mean that assessment of and assistance for children with special educational needs will be given more quickly?

Mr. Dunn: I understand my hon. Friend's point. Useful pointers may be derived from the way in which a child performs as a result of the application of the national curriculum. Thus, the national curriculum may provide a long stop in the identification of specific learning difficulties.

Mr. Janner: Does the Minister accept that the Department of Education and Science and local education authorities do not have the power to provide children with the special need which many of them require most, which is physiotherapy, and that the Department of Health and Social Security has to be brought in for schools such as the Western Park school in my constituency, where some 50 children need physiotherapy and have the use of one physiotherapist for one hour each week? Is that not a disgrace?

Mr. Dunn: The hon. and learned Gentleman will be pleased to know that all local education authorities are now operating the procedures introduced by the Education Act 1981. He rightly draws attention to a specific concern, but he knows that the employment of physiotherapists is not a matter directly for my Department.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Will my hon. Friend allay the fears of the parents of deaf children and give an assurance that the special needs of their children will be fully met by the proposals in the Education Reform Bill?

Mr. Dunn: We shall be asking for and taking advice from a variety of working groups on children with special needs. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the needs of children who suffer from deafness in one form or another.

Mr. Fatchett: Is the Minister aware of the excellent work carried out by the Inner London education authority for children with special educational needs? Is he also aware that last week parents in ILEA expressed overwhelmingly their satisfaction with the authority and their desire that it should continue? Is it the Government's policy to listen to parents only when they say what the Government want? Will they just ignore the strong wishes of Inner London parents?

Mr. Dunn: The hon. Member is incorrect when he says that the ballot last week was of all Inner London education authority parents. It was not. I have every confidence that the London boroughs will continue to provide for children with special educational needs in the future when they become education authorities in their own right.

Student Loans

10. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he is yet in a position to make a statement on student loans.

Mr. Jackson: No Sir. The Government will determine their policy in the light of the conclusions of the review of student support. They will publish their proposals for the future of student support in due course.

Sir John Farr: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has said. Will he look into the possibility of introducing a pilot scheme whereby loans could be made to students whose application for a grant had been turned down by the local education authority?

Mr. Jackson: This is certainly one of the subjects that we shall be looking at in the student support review, and I have considerable personal sympathy with my hon. Friend's suggestion.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 19 April.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Squire: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the resolution passed in the Danish Parliament on 14 April on ships visits is not compatible with our long-standing policy of neither confirming nor denying that our ships are carrying nuclear weapons? Will she further confirm that this has major implications for our commitment to Denmark if we are requested to give assistance in the future?

The Prime Minister: Yes. That resolution, which is very similar to a New Zealand one, has very far-reaching implications for the whole of NATO policy. The Danish Folketing passed a resolution that nuclear weapons were not welcome, even on ships going into harbours in Denmark. That, in view of our policy neither to confirm nor to deny the presence of nuclear weapons on ships, means that ships cannot visit and cannot practise reinforcement exercises. It has very grave implications, which we must consider in NATO, for the whole of NATO policy.

Mr. Kinnock: Can the Prime Minister tell us whether there has been any progress with what Ministers recognise to be an important investigation into the serious matter of the leak of the minutes of her meeting on 11 April with the Secretary of State for the Environment and other Ministers on the poll tax and housing benefit?

The Prime Minister: No. I have nothing further to report to the House on that matter.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister regard that leak as serious because it jeopardises national security or because it exposes the organised mendacity of the Government?

The Prime Minister: No. So long as people are prepared to receive such documents there will be some people who will pass them on.

Mr. Kinnock: So much is understood, but as it is now clear that on 11 April the Prime Minister agreed that the poll tax concessions announced last week should be paid for by poll tax increases not announced last week and that those concessions should then be reduced by further housing benefit cuts, is it not obvious that since last Monday the Prime Minister and other Ministers have been seeking to double-cross their Back Benchers, and that for some it has worked?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman, as usual, has only very partial information, from a received, stolen document. There were a series of meetings last week, which led to a wide discussion about the community charge and to the announced decision to reduce the rate at which benefit should be withdrawn in 1990-91 for the purposes of the community charge. The right hon. Gentleman knows that decision. Consistent with it, the rate at which housing benefit for rent payments will be withdrawn in 1989-90 will not be increased. The whole community charge rebate arrangements will, of course, be treated as one. Further meetings last week concluded that decisions on the related Exchequer grant for 1990-91 cannot be taken until the summer of 1989, in accordance with the normal procedures. I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. John Carlisle: Will my right hon. Friend take time today to contact the British Amateur Athletic Board and urge it to reject the recommendation of the International Amateur Athletics Federation that Miss Zola Budd be banned for 12 months? Does she agree that this form of blackmail in international sport is totally unacceptable, particularly when the victim is completely innocent of the offence?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend is aware, we subscribe to the Gleneagles agreement. The particular matter to which he refers is for the British Amateur Athletic Board and the International Amateur Athletics Federation, but a number of us find it rather repugnant that so much effort is now concerned with stopping a young woman from competing in international athletics.

Q2. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 19 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. and learned Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Carlile: Will the right hon. Lady follow the advice given by the DHSS of putting cooking foil under her bottom sheet and of not going shopping when she is hungry, or is that cynical advice to be reserved for middle-aged widows living on social security?

The Prime Minister: I saw the reports of the advice to which the hon. and learned Gentleman refers. I understand that those who advise people on social security have been giving advice for a very considerable time. If one looks at the leaflet, which obviously I did after I had seen the report, because, like the hon. and learned Gentleman, I found some of it very distasteful, one finds that a great deal of the advice is very sensible. I share the hon. and learned Gentleman's views about two or three particular things, but I am informed, after inquiry, that there are people who will give advice, if asked, and that the advice has been given on the same basis, although perhaps not in the same detail, for a very long time.

Mr. Warren: May I ask my right hon. Friend whether, following her reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), she will consider the fact that, devoted as this country is to the nuclear deterrent within NATO, she should make it clear to the Soviet delegation to this country when she meets it later this afternoon that we are interested in making sure that there are nuclear reductions on both sides and that we are looking for substantial reductions in conventional arms in order to further the cause of peace?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. We welcome the agreement on nuclear reductions, but we are very well aware of the fact that, beyond the agreement that we hope will be reached on strategic weapons, we need to embark upon reductions in conventional weapons and chemical weapons. Proposals are being prepared for that very purpose.

Mr. Sean Hughes: Does the Prime Minister recall the circumstances in which her folk hero, Sir Winston Churchill, came to power? It was because that the then Conservative Prime Minister had resigned because his majority had fallen to 81, with 33 Tory Members of Parliament voting against him?

As the Prime Minister's majority slumped to 25 last night, with 38 Members voting against her, will she explain to the House why the precedent set in Winston's day does not apply now?

The Prime Minister: I remember that one of Sir Winston Churchill's sayings was that in this House of Commons one is enough. It most certainly was for the Labour party, because it nationalised aircraft and shipbuilding by a majority of one vote, and a very questionable one, too.

Q40. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 19 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Amess: Has my right hon. Friend seen a report that a 28-bed ward at St. Thomas' hospital will now remain open following an £85,000 reduction in its rates bill as a result of this Government capping Lambeth council's rates? Does it not suggest that excessive rate increases damage jobs and businesses and also damage the Health Service and health care?

The Prime Minister: Yes, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. The high rates of profligate Labour authorities drive out jobs and divert resources that ought to go to health care. If the news that he has given is true, there must be many people in Lambeth who are delighted with this Government's rate-capping policies, which have had such a good result.

Ms. Short: Will the Prime Minister tell the House her views on the behaviour of the Israeli Government following the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories? Will she use the influence that she has with America to arrange an international conference so that a settlement can be achieved, whereby a Palestinian state will stand side by side with an Israeli state? That is the only answer.

The Prime Minister: We are doing everything that we possibly can to try to get negotiations going in the middle east. A vacuum is the worst thing for that part of the world. As the hon. Lady knows, we have used our influence with the United States. We also support Mr. Shultz in continuing his initiative. We support an international conference as a framework for negotiations between Israel, King Hussein of Jordan and a Palestinian delegation. It is important that efforts to that end should continue.

Q5. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 19 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Dr. Twinn: Does my right hon. Friend welcome the report of the National Association of Health Authorities in England and Wales, which states that patients who do not receive their treatment within a reasonable period of time should, at no cost to themselves, be able to turn to the private sector? The bill will then be picked up by the National Health Service.

The Prime Minister: I know that new evidence has arrived recently, which is going to the Department of Health and Social Security. The report contains a number of valuable proposals for reform of the National Health Service. The report is particularly concerned with the waiting time for operations and contains the proposal that my hon. Friend stated. It will be considered carefully. We are most anxious that waiting time should be reduced and that the money that goes to the National Health Service should be used to maximum efficiency.

Q6. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 19 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Welsh: Is the Prime Minister aware of the loss of 28,000 electors in Scotland? That is equivalent to the disappearance of the whole of the Caithness and Sutherland constituency and is against all demographic trends. How can she explain such a massive failure to register, except in terms of the poll tax, which no one but her Government wants?

The Prime Minister: There is a duty to register and it is up to citizens to exercise that duty. If they accept the freedom of citizenship, they should not opt out of their responsibility.

Q7. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 19 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Tredinnick: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the single European market, which will be introduced in 1992, offers immense opportunities to British industry? Does she also agree that if British industry is to take advantage of that agreement, it must act now?

The Prime Minister: We have been working towards a single market in Europe for a long time. It is a market of some 320 million people. It is far larger than the market in Japan or the market in the United States. It offers great opportunities for business and commerce in this country. I agree with my hon. Friend that British industry should prepare for it now in order to get the right goods and services to meet consumer demand in that market. My right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is setting up conferences. There will be 20 regional conferences. Areas such as my hon. Friend's should be in a very good position to take advantage of that single common market.

Q9. **Mr. Stevens:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 19 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Stevens: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in my constituency, and in other parts of the midlands, house prices have risen substantially in recent months? The sale of houses is now comparatively easy. Does she agree that that is a reflection of the increasing prosperity in the midlands, which has been achieved through the economic policies of the Government?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I have seen the reports about house prices. There is an excellent demand for houses in the west midlands. There are also some very good estates of new private houses being built. Unemployment is falling faster in the west midlands than in any other part of the United Kingdom and prosperity is increasing. It is good news for all.

Mr. Mullin: May we take it that the Prime Minister is now in favour of persons who blow up oil rigs?

The Prime Minister: I am in favour of action against those who lay mines against shipping in the Gulf—action under article 51 of the United Nations—and of not letting people get away with constantly causing extra trouble on what should be a free international seaway. I fully support the action taken by the United States.

Q10. **Mr. Hanley:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 19 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hanley: Will my right hon. Friend continue to do all that she can to protect the British Merchant and Royal Navy seamen in the Gulf and to serve Britain's interests in furthering world peace in that area?

The Prime Minister: Yes, the Armilla patrol has been there for nearly eight years and will continue to be there, together with the minesweepers. We co-operate closely with the other fleets in the Gulf to ensure that that seaway is kept free and open for shipping of all nations.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have notice of a personal statement first. Mr. Ron Brown.

Personal Statement

3.30 pm

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): I should like to make a statement concerning an incident last evening. Of course, the media have made much of it——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman resume his seat? I advise him that he must make the statement that has been agreed with me.

Mr. Brown: I can agree many things, and if I apologise —*[Interruption.]*—I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden)——

Mr. Speaker: Order. What the hon. Gentleman is now about to do, quite correctly, is laid down in our practice. He must make the personal statement that he has agreed with me.

Mr. Brown: With respect, Mr. Speaker, that statement is not acceptable. The facts, in all fairness to yourself and to others in this place—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Brown *rose*——

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has agreed a statement which he wishes to make to the House—*[Interruption.]* Well, if the hon. Gentleman does not now wish to make it to the House, that puts a completely different complexion upon it.

Mr. Brown: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, I am on my feet. If the hon. Gentleman is prepared to make the statement which has been agreed and in the proper form, I will hear him. If he seeks to qualify it in any way, I regret—it would be with regret—that I cannot hear it.

Mr. Brown: Since you know the grovelling statement, Mr. Speaker, I am not going to read it out; I am going to accept it. Right? [HON. MEMBERS: "No."]

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that it is a grovelling statement and I ask the hon. Gentleman to make it.

Mr. Brown: All right, I will make a statement. This is the place, so they say, where precedent is so firmly established. My statement is simply this—it is only a few words—if the House is embarrassed, I must say that it is true that last evening an incident happened and I was involved. I apologise to the hon. Members——

Mr. Speaker: Order—*[Interruption.]* Order. Will the House please allow me to deal with this? I advise the hon. Gentleman that whatever private advice he may have received, as far as I am concerned and as far as the House is concerned, I must abide by our practice. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to make a personal statement—I hope that he does—it must be made in the form which has been agreed with me. I give him an opportunity now to do that; otherwise I am afraid that I may have to take other action.

Mr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can I just say to you—[HON. MEMBERS: "No".]

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman wants to come and say anything to me, he must do so privately after he has made his statement, but he must make his statement now.

Mr. Brown: Obviously, if, really—*[Interruption.]* In view of the fact—*[Interruption.]* So be it——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must say to the hon. Gentleman for the last time that he should make his personal statement now, without qualifications.

Mr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I grovel, grovel and say—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a personal statement.

Mr. Brown *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman does not make his statement, I shall be forced to take other action.

Mr. Brown: May I quote, Mr. Speaker—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I wish to make a personal statement —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is making his personal statement.

Mr. Brown: With regard to the Mace—I do not know who he is—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."]—I apologise to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the House because I accept responsibility for any damage that was sustained by the Mace. I did not write this rubbish but you know it—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."]

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot accept that as a personal statement by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Brown *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must ask the hon. Gentleman now to leave the Chamber while I consider carefully what further action I shall have to take on the matter.

Mr. Brown: This is the agreed statement.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the hon. Gentleman now to leave the Chamber, otherwise I shall be forced to name him.

Mr. Brown: That was the agreed statement.

Mr. Speaker: I ask the hon. Gentleman to leave the Chamber.

The hon. Member left the Chamber.

Mr. Speaker: Ten-minute Bill. Miss Widdecombe. *[Interruption.]* Will the hon. Lady kindly resume her seat for one moment? If hon. Members are not remaining for the ten-minute Bill, will they please leave the Chamber quietly?

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will take the point of order after the ten-minute Bill. Miss Widdecombe.

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have already called the hon. Lady. I will take the points of order after the hon. Lady has finished.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I have already said to the right hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Onslow) that I have called the hon. Lady to move her ten-minute Bill. I will take the points of order after she has done so.

School Bus Passes (Revision of Regulations)

3.38 pm

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the law relating to school bus passes to allow local authorities greater flexibility in establishing routes and charging for transporting children to school.

The reason for the Bill is that, under present regulations, as set down by section 55 of the Education Act 1944, local authorities are obliged to supply free transport passes for children over eight years who live more than three miles from their school and for children under eight years who live more than two miles from their school. The result of that is that local authorities measure the route between a child's home and school, and assess whether that child is eligible for free transport on that basis.

The route taken is the shortest and some routes are extremely hazardous. I have walked lonely country routes which are designated as the correct and proper route for a child to take, walking to school, and some of them are not safe for fully grown adults to walk, let alone children. They go through lonely fields and woods. With all the publicity that has been given to the problems of abduction and molestation, I find it incredible that we still have this provision in the Act.

According to a ruling of the Law Lords, in assessing whether a route is unduly hazardous, county councils are not obliged to take any note of whether a child travels that route alone. Yet it is unreasonable to assume that a secondary school child will be accompanied to school every day, particularly if the parents of that child must accompany younger children to school. This Bill would make it compulsory for county councils to take account of the fact that a child may be travelling a route unaccompanied when they assess whether it is unduly hazardous.

This morning, I heard my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport campaigning for greater road safety for children, but some routes that have been established as manageable for children are clearly not and present immense traffic hazards.

Furthermore, the present law throws up too many anomalies. In my constituency, an entire village has lost its entitlement to free school transport because the school gate has been moved from one side of the school to the other and, lo and behold, they are now within a few yards of the three-mile limit. Two children can stand at the same bus stop and make the same journey to school, one having to pay the full fare and the other travelling free.

Problems arise when parents want to send a child to a school of a particular denomination and that school is more than three miles from the child's home. The child is not entitled to free transport unless the child has been baptised or received into that denomination. Many parents want their children to have a traditional Christian upbringing which they can receive only in Church and Catholic schools, but there may be nearer schools on which the children's entitlement to free transport is assessed.

That makes nonsense of our wise policy of increasing parental choice, because that choice will be limited by the expenses that parents can meet. In my constituency, a child eligible for a concessionary fare—a child can have a

[Miss Ann Widdecombe]

concessionary fare only if there is a bus; it is not automatic —has to pay £50 per term. One hundred pounds to send two children to school is prohibitive for some parents and will result in certain schools being removed from their area of choice.

My county council supports this measure, and in 1980 the Government tried to introduce a similar measure. It was rejected in another place because, sadly, we laid down clear rules for how we could afford the extra costs involved in providing additional free transport. If we charge everybody something, we shall be able to extend the range of transport provided, but there is no need to lay down rules for that calculation. County councils should be able to choose according to the prevailing conditions. My own has come up with a scheme which would not penalise rural schools, but would help rural communities. This Bill would give county councils the flexibility to introduce different rules for assessing hazards and charging for transport.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Miss Ann Widdecombe, Mrs. Gillian Shephard, Mr. Henry Bellingham, Mr. Julian Brazier, Mr. David Evans, Mr. David Davis, Mr. John Redwood, Mr. James Cran, Mr. Keith Mans, Mr. David Nicholson, Mr. Simon Burns and Mr. David Porter.

SCHOOL BUS PASSES (REVISION OF REGULATIONS)

Miss Ann Widdecombe accordingly presented a Bill to amend the law relating to school bus passes to allow local authorities greater flexibility in establishing routes and charging for transporting children to school: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 13 May and to be printed. [Bill 142.]

Personal Statement (Points of Order)

3.45 pm

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The whole House will have heard the unsatisfactory exchanges between yourself and the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown), when the hon. Gentleman clearly and deliberately refused to abide by the rules of the House and make an apology in a form agreed with you, as the rules lay down, for his disgraceful action yesterday evening.

I think that the House understands that, confronted with such extraordinary defiance, it is right that you, Mr. Speaker, should have had a moment or two to reflect upon what action you could take to protect the dignity and authority of the Chair and of the House as a whole, but equally the House is now entitled to know what remedies lie in your hands and in ours, and how soon they will be proceeded with.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I shall take the point of order to be raised by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer).

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have just consulted the Clerks of the House and understand that the attitude that you have taken is based on "Erskine May", which says that you have to give leave. You have just given leave to the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) to present a ten-minute Bill. Giving leave does not mean that you have to agree with what she said or what is in the Bill. As far as I can see, we have now strayed beyond what is acceptable and understandable in the House of Commons.

I always understood, contrary to what some new Members might think, that personal statements were personal statements, not statements agreed with anybody else. If the statement was not acceptable, one had to decide afterwards whether it was acceptable. But it is a personal statement. In the House, are we now reaching the stage where personal statements are no longer acceptable? *[Interruption.]* Let me say to hon. Members who have just come in that some of us believe in the House of Commons and its procedures. The reason we do so is that— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The point of order is to me.

Mr. Heffer: The reason is that we passionately believe in parliamentary democracy, which has been fought for over the years. I am asking how the interpretation of the paragraph in "Erskine May" means that a statement has to be agreed—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is outside the House, and he is speaking.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Heffer: I ask how a statement has to be agreed with Mr. Speaker before an hon. Member can make it, having accepted that he made a mistake in the House.

That is my point. I want an explanation. Perhaps I have been living in a fool's paradise——

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member is making his point of order to me, not to Members on the Government Benches.

Mr. Heffer: If one takes the example of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) who lifted up the Mace and wielded it above his head, almost hitting hon. Members, I always believed that his personal statement was made by him alone and was not necessarily agreed with anyone else. Where does it say that Mr. Speaker must agree with a personal statement?

Mr. Speaker: I will deal with that matter at once. It has long been a tradition in the House, and certainly it was the case in the episode that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned, that personal statements are also agreed with Mr. Speaker. It is Mr. Speaker who gives leave for a right hon. or hon. Member to make such a statement. I hoped very much that a personal statement would be made this afternoon, in the terms that had been given to me and that I had agreed. I deeply regret that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) felt unable to do that.

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. Over the years, this House has been accustomed to recognising that things may be said or done in the heat of the moment that are regretted afterwards. This House has always been extremely tolerant in accepting apologies for things that happen in the heat of the moment. On this occasion, the Mace, which is the symbol of the dignity of the House, was thrown to the floor of the House and, I understand, severely damaged.

If the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) had expressed regret for his action, I am sure the House would have accepted his apology. It is clear from what we have heard this afternoon that the hon. Gentleman was not prepared to express his regrets; he spoke in terms of "Grovel, grovel, grovel." That is not acceptable to the House.

Some of us view with increasing anxiety the way in which some hon. Members treat the House and its traditions with increasing contempt. The time has come to put a stop to it. [HON. MEMBERS "Hear, hear!"] We regard a five-day suspension on full pay as inadequate. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to look into the matter further and to inquire whether it is possible to ask for compensation in respect of any damage that may have been done to the Mace.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not believe that we can profitably pursue this matter by points of order. I am bound by the penalties that are described in "Erskine May". I call the Leader of the House.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): This is a very serious matter, made worse by the events in the Chamber that we have just witnessed. I will arrange for urgent discussions to take place between the usual channels with a view to tabling a Government motion later today.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that any further points of order can arise from the remarks of the Leader of the House.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): It is important that an incorrect statement of the practice of the House should not be allowed to go unchallenged and therefore become the record. The reason why Mr. Speaker is required to give his agreement before a personal statement may be made is that the statement is neither debatable nor subject to interruption. That is why your predecessors, Mr. Speaker, have always enforced the rule of no departure from that statement. For instance, in the case of the late right hon. John Stonehouse, when he three times endeavoured to depart from the agreed personal statement, each time Mr. Speaker Lloyd recalled him very firmly to the statement that he, as Mr. Speaker, had approved. It is important that the record in this matter be stated correctly.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman was entirely correct in what he said. He said in terms of explanation what I said as a matter of fact.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) is my parliamentary neighbour. I think that the House should understand that here is an hon. Member who has suffered an industrial injury such as most of us have been spared.

My point of order, Mr. Speaker, is succinct. I understood, having made a personal statement, that such a statement was a matter between the hon. Member concerned and Mr. Speaker. It would have been very much better if you had dealt with the situation than that my hon. Friend should be triggered off by noise. Some of us would think interruptions very vulgar and insensitive in such difficult circumstances. In all the consideration, could it be made clear that, when a personal statement is made, the whole House is silent, leaves this difficult matter to the Speaker of the House of Commons and does not start interrupting?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): They were hounding him.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) had made his statement in the form that he agreed with me, it would have been heard in silence. I agree with the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) that the House is always generous in those circumstances.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you confirm that the Mace is not the property of the House, but the property of Her Majesty? Is it possible for you to ascertain and tell the House how much damage was done to that extraordinarily valuable piece of property?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member is entirely correct, and that assessment is being made.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you confirm that the motion that the Government are proposing to put down will be debatable, and that it will be a three-hour debate? Can you also confirm that the time of the tabling of the motion will be displayed throughout the House on the annunciators, so that the Government do not try to slip it through the back door without hon. Members knowing?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that, in view of the business that is now before the House, I can deal with the matter finally by saying that, while of course I have not seen the motion that is to be put down, I can confirm to the hon. Gentleman and the House that it will certainly be debatable. I shall ensure as far as possible that the timing is well known to every hon. Member in the House.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that I can take any more points of order. We are to have a debate tomorrow.

Orders of the Day

Local Government Finance Bill

[2nd Allotted Day]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

Clause 2

PERSONS SUBJECT TO PERSONAL COMMUNITY CHARGE

3.58 pm

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): I beg to move amendment No. 40, in page 1, line 15, after 'over', insert

'but has not attained his 80th birthday'.

Mr. Speaker: With this we shall take the following amendments: No. 41, in page 1, line 15, at end insert 'provided he is not in receipt of any form of income support'.

No. 140, in page 2, line 6, leave out subsection (3).

No. 103, in page 76, line 7, in schedule 1, at end insert 'or is detained on remand'.

No. 207, in page 76, line 7, at end insert 'or held on remand'.

No. 202, in page 76, line 26, after 'mentally', insert 'and physically'.

No. 125, in page 76, leave out lines 30 to 38.

No. 203, in page 76, line 30, after 'mentally', insert 'and physically'.

No. 126, in page 76, line 31, leave out 'certified as' and insert 'deemed to be'.

No. 204, in page 76, line 31, after 'mentally', insert 'and physically'.

No. 127, in page 76, line 33, leave out from 'from' to 'involves' in line 34.

No. 208, in page 76, line 35, at end insert 'or acquires a disability resulting in severe impairment of intelligence and social functioning through accident or disease.'

No. 128, in page 76, line 41, at end insert 'or is a full-time school pupil'.

No. 129, in page 77, line 3, leave out from 'education' to end of line 5.

No. 130, in page 77, line 5, at end insert 'or is undergoing a course of training leading to qualification as a nurse'.

No. 131, in page 77, line 19, at end insert 'and

(c) he is not liable to pay income tax.'.

No. 132, in page 78, line 20, at beginning insert '(1)'.

No. 1, in page 78, line 26, at end insert—

'Members of Religious Communities

(1) A person is an exempt individual on a particular day if he lives as a member of a religious community.

(2) The Secretary of State shall by order define what constitutes a religious community at any particular time.'.

No. 133, in page 78, line 26, at end insert—

"(2) For this purpose a designated dwelling shall be taken to include a nunnery or monastery or other dwelling used by members of a religious order whose members have taken vows of poverty and in such circumstances there shall be no liability for collective community charge.'

No. 222, in page 78, line 26, at end insert—

'Homeless People

A person is an exempt individual on a particular day if at any time on the day his sole or main residence is not a permanent structure.'.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it connected with this Bill? I am not taking any further points of order arising out of the former matter.

Mr. Douglas: I accept that, Mr. Speaker. That is why I have been hesitant in raising the point.

The House is rightly conscious of the privilege, propriety and constitutionality of the proceedings. Yesterday, however, a distinct vote in the House showed a definite shift in opinion relating to the poll tax legislation. We have been made aware, through public pressure and the media, that Lord Jenkins of Hillhead is to seek leave in another place to move a motion asking the Government to take some time to reflect on what has happened here and in the country before the Second Reading debate proceeds in the other place.

On the Order Paper for this evening and tomorrow evening are two orders relating to the poll tax legislation for Scotland. As Scotland is being made a guinea pig for this legislation before it has the whole-hearted approval of the rest of the nation, would it not be wise for the Government to desist from proceeding with any further orders to do with the Scottish legislation before this matter has been the subject of at least some deliberation in another place?

Mr. Speaker: That is certainly not a matter for me. In this Chamber there are opportunities to amend legislation, and the House made its decision last night.

Mr. Cormack: I want to recall one of the former hon. Members of this House whom I admired most—the noble Lord Broxbourne, who sat next to me for many years as Sir Derek Walker-Smith. He was one of the principal opponents of entry to the Common Market. He deployed his case with vigour and clarity, and always with complete courtesy and firmness. Although I did not find myself in the Lobby with him during those debates in the early 1970s, my respect for him grew with each speech that he made, because he debated as a true parliamentarian. When, at the end of the day, the House decided, against his profound convictions, that we should go into the European Community, he said that it was then his duty to try to ensure that what he had prophesied did not come to pass and that the thing worked.

Sir Derek was one of the first and leading members of the delegated group to the European Assembly. I believe that he chaired the Legal Committee in that assembly, and he played a most constructive part in helping to mould it and direct its deliberations. It is in that spirit that I hope to approach the amendments this afternoon.

I have never voted for the community charge or poll tax. I did not vote for it in the Scottish legislation in the last Parliament; I have not cast a single vote in its favour, nor do I intend to do so——

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): My hon. Friend paid a well justified tribute to our noble and learned Friend Lord Broxbourne, but so eloquent was that tribute that I must ask whether my noble Friend has died. If not, what was the purpose of the eulogy?

Mr. Cormack: If my hon. Friend had listened a little more carefully, he would have heard me imply that I believed that the manner in which the noble Lord approached that subject was a model and a lesson for us all. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) had such a profound conscientious objection to one aspect of Government policy that he gave up an extremely promising career in the Government to sit on the Back Benches and criticise and vote against that aspect of policy. So he, of all people, should respect those of us who cannot go along with the Government on this policy.

The task of those of us who oppose the poll tax is now to try to take the sting out of it, to make it fairer and to remove the aspects of it that cause most concern. That there is concern no one can deny. The vote last night eloquently underlined that. No Conservative Member does not know colleagues who agonised about how they should vote and who told us—I do not criticise them for it—as we went into the Lobby at the end of the debate last night that they were with us in spirit but did not quite feel they could accompany us into the Lobby. That happens in the House from time to time. I hazard a guess that if there was such a thing as a secret ballot here, the result last night would have been rather different.

We now have a clear commitment by the Government to introduce the poll tax and an equally clear recognition by my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench that some of us believe the tax is still unfair. The two amendments in my name have far more simple and less far-reaching aims than the amendment we debated yesterday.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I have just arrived in the Chamber, but I understand that the hon. Gentleman said that if there had been a secret, rather than a recorded vote, the new clause would probably have been carried last night. I certainly think that the Government would have been defeated on a free vote, but does he agree that, if there were a free vote in the Cabinet, it is likely that there would not be a majority for the poll tax even there?

Mr. Cormack: I have never been in the Cabinet and my stand on this and other issues is unlikely to make my accession to that august body any more probable.

The amendments have two simple aims, and I believe that they would make this tax fairer in the eyes of the public. The first is designed to remove people over the age of 80 from liability for the tax, and the Government have already recognised the justice of my general ambition in the second. It would take out of the tax altogether those who are in receipt of what is now called income support and what was until recently known at supplementary benefit.

I shall deal first with the over-80s. One of the pledges in our manifesto when I was elected in 1970—it was quickly implemented, I hasten to add—and which caused most emotional support in the country was that to give pensions to people over 80 who did not receive them of right because they had not contributed. Successive Governments since the war, Labour and Conservative, had held out on the contributory principle, but between 1968 and 1969 the Conservative Party, much to its credit, decided to commit itself to giving pensions to the over-80s.

In a particularly eloquent speech in October 1969 the then hon. Member for Finchley—now my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister—said:

"there comes a time when a principle has to be abandoned if the reality of the situation is such that some people are suffering hardship."—[*Official Report*, 31 October 1969; Vol. 790, c. 591.]

[Mr. Cormack]

That is as classic an enunciation of the non-doctrinaire, pragmatic, Conservative approach to social services as I have ever heard. It is a policy that still guides my right hon. Friend and her colleagues, and they could remind themselves of it now with profit.

People who are over 80 form a group that includes a large percentage of elderly relatives—mothers, fathers, uncles and grandparents—whom younger people have taken into their homes and are looking after. They are providing that loving family place that all hon. Members ought to regard with genuine respect and admiration, because it is a true family unit. Such old people will have to pay the community charge, the poll tax, if amendments such as this one are not accepted.

In order to help and encourage younger people who play this sustaining and often costly role, there is real merit in what I am suggesting. I know that my hon. and learned Friend the Minister who piloted the Bill with great eloquence and skill through the Committee will argue that many of these old people will be helped. That is true, and it is right that it should be so, but they will not be totally helped. They will all still have to pay something, and not a few of them will have to pay the whole whack, because they will not qualify for help.

Last week we discussed the £6,000 cut-off limit that many of us thought was far too low in the context of 1988 and when measured against our exhortations to prudence and thrift. Yesterday, in his speech in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates), my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment made a clear, unequivocal and total acknowledgment of the fact that such concessions as are available to the elderly in the Bill will be linked to the system, and that the £6,000 limit will apply.

Many people over the age of 80 therefore will not qualify for help and although I do not think that there can be many families who consider these matters in mercenary terms that will be a real financial deterrent to some people. It may make them say that the cost of conversion of a room and all the other things that go with it make it impossible for them to take in a mother or a granny or whoever it might be. If such an old person who is no longer able to look after himself or herself has to go into some form of care, then within a measurable period, if not immediately, the cost to public funds will be infinitely greater than any concession that might be made by my right hon. Friend. We should look at these things in that light.

Mr. Ralph Howell (Norfolk, North): I sympathise with my hon. Friend's proposition, but surely he realises that not all people over the age of 80 are in need of help. The people that he is concerned with are the over-80s who are not very affluent, but some old people over the age of 80 are not in that category. May I commend to my hon. Friend my new clause 5? It would transfer the raising of funds for local authorities to a VAT supplement. That would mean that people over 80 who had little income would pay a very small community charge, but people who were richer would pay considerably more.

Mr. Cormack: I am sure that my hon. Friend and I are aiming to achieve similar ends. However, I am speaking not to new clause 5 but to amendment No. 40. That amendment has one overriding and commendable virtue, if I may say so without immodesty. It is that it is simple, easy to understand and totally clear. My hon. Friend was right when he said that some people over the age of 80 are affluent and will not need the sort of support that I am suggesting. We are back to the child benefit argument. Most of those people will be paying high income tax on unearned income.

In order to benefit those in genuine need who will not be affected by the concessions that have already been made, we should allow the so-called affluent over-80s to have a tax holiday—that is what it amounts to—for a small amount of tax. Those who have worked hard and saved, and who have made a real contribution to our economy, deserve a tax holiday at the end of their lives. In a spirit of general benevolence, there would be nothing to criticise in a Government who decided to award those people such a modest bonus.

4.15 pm

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): My hon. Friend is a very compassionate man and we all want to show compassion. Has my hon. Friend worked out roughly how much this will cost? How many people are there over the age of 80? It is 1 million or so, is it not—and at £200 each that is £200 million. My hon. Friend has pointed out the problem of elderly people taken in by and staying with their families. Would it not be more satisfactory if one were spending this sort of money to target expenditure particularly to those over 80 who are staying with their families rather than to over-80s in total? After all, some ex-Members of Parliament on index-linked pensions may not require this munificence.

Mr. Cormack: If when he replies to this debate my hon. and learned Friend the Minister, in a spirit of conciliation, says that he will ensure that all those living with their families will be exempt, then I shall consider very carefully whether it might be better to accept that rather than the whole of that for which I am asking. I am a reasonable and moderate person and I like to encourage my right hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench to behave in a similar manner.

It would not be in the interests of the House for me to accede to other interventions because I know that other hon. Members are anxious to speak. I should like to make one last point on this group of elderly people. It is one about which we should all remind ourselves from time to time—that inflation, at whatever level, always benefits to some degree the earners but never the savers or those who no longer have any earning capacity.

I should now like to come to the second of my two amendments, No. 41. It deals with people who are in receipt of income support or, as it was so recently called, supplementary benefit. I readily acknowledge that the Government have gone to considerable trouble to try to ensure that those for whom the poll tax will be a real imposition will be cushioned from the blow. One does not have to be a great student of these matters, nor does one have to read every line of the Committee *Hansard*, to realise that the system that has been devised with skill and care, as I frankly acknowledge, is exceptionally complicated and very difficult to understand.

Even the extra and welcome concession made on Thursday last is so complicated that I was stopped several times at the weekend and asked precisely what it meant. I

was not asked that question by people of low intelligence. *[Interruption.]* There is merit in simplicity; unlike one of my hon. Friends who is muttering, not all my constituents are fellows of All Souls. He would obviously grace its common room and high table, but not many of my constituents would be able to emulate him. Perhaps my hon. and learned Friend the Minister would reflect for a moment on the point that I sought to make in an intervention during yesterday's debate. I said that, if anyone had suggested a uniform domestic rate and that, without any regard for the location, size, character or condition of the property, the rich man in his castle and the poor man at his gate should all pay the same, he would have been laughed out of court.

However, we are now being confronted, not on a property basis, but on a personal basis, with precisely that recommendation. It is for that simple reason, and because I believe that the proposal flies in the face of a long and honourable tenet of Tory social policy, that I cannot go along with the Bill, as I hope I have always made plain.

However, if we consider the most needy in our community, we see that most, if not all, of them are either qualified for or receive income support. Instead of making them quake at the thought of forms and devising a most elaborate system to try to bring their contribution down to about 20 per cent.—even if we help some of them with that—it would be a simple and proper gesture to remove those people from liability for tax. That gesture would be entirely in accord with the principle enunciated by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when she made her plea for pensions for the over-80s.

In the past nine years, this country has prospered greatly. It has done so—I do not expect Opposition Members to agree with me—largely as a result of the courageous and determined leadership of the Government. But we are in danger of creating a society in which those least able to fend for themselves are not accorded the same recognition and regard as those who, by their efforts and ability, prosper and progress. I am all for incentives and encouraging people, and I am against punitive taxation, but hon. Members, especially on this side of the House, have a particular duty to consider those people.

Our social services have been created by those in all parties. The invaluable contribution of the Christian Socialists in the last century and earlier this century should never be forgotten; nor should we forget the contribution of Lord Beveridge and those others in the Liberal party who played their part. However, neither should we forget the contribution of those hon. Members who sat on this side of the House and were proud to be members of the Conservative party, as I am today.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): They are different now.

Mr. Cormack: Every generation has different priorities. Every generation of government has different tasks to accomplish. This generation of government has had peculiarly difficult tasks to accomplish.

Mr. Rogers: They are not gentlemen now.

Mr. Cormack: I ask the hon. Gentleman to contain himself a little.

I implore my hon. and learned Friend the Minister to consider a little further this group of people, who are the most needy in our society and among whom are numbered the elderly, the handicapped, the infirm and single parents struggling to bring up families. They have many domestic problems with which many of us would find it difficult to cope.

When the Minister has considered that, I hope that he will agree that instead of an elaborate system of concessions and rebates, which make people feel that they are receiving state-administered charity which they have to go through so many processes to obtain, those people deserve extra help. Some of them will be permanently deserving, but for others it will be a helping hand to put them back on the road to earning a living. We should remove them from that tax liability.

I do not believe that the acceptance of either amendment or both would make perfect what I still consider to be a bad tax, but it would help enormously. It would be popular in the country, but, far more important, it would be right and would show that there had been a clear and unequivocal recognition of those deserving groups.

Of course anomalies would remain. The flat rate would remain. Someone living in a small house would still pay as much as someone living in a large house. But, in a spirit of true compromise, we would have grasped one particular nettle.

I hope that my hon. and learned Friend will recognise that there is justice, reason and real purpose in what I am seeking to advocate. I sincerely hope that, at the end of the debate, there will be need not for a Division, but rather for thanks and acclamation.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I shall be brief, as I wish to ask only two questions. First, in response to the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), who presented his amendment very movingly, I must point out that we in Scotland are rather nearer the situation than people in England. Decisions are being made in homes in my constituency and in every other Scottish constituency as to whether granny or mother-in-law and others can remain any longer. Most people, come the poll tax, will decide that they do not take the decision on the basis of the poll tax. It is no good overegging and exaggerating a case because that damages it.

However, another situation may arise if the decision is whether mother-in-law, granny or auntie should come to live with a young or middle-aged couple. The fact that the poll tax will have to be paid then enters into the equation and into the decision as to whether to take in the person.

Perhaps the Minister will tell us whether there has been any assessment at the Department of the Environment in respect of the number of extra people who will now have to be paid for, as the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South suggested, in old people's homes, which is far more expensive to the state, and does not take into account the loss in terms of loving care. Have any calculations been made as to the effect of those measures on the number of people who will have to be accepted into publicly financed homes and, if not, why not?

Secondly, I should like to ask the Minister a question, following the written question that I put to the Secretary of State for Scotland yesterday as to

"how many extra posts will be created in the Scottish courts administration in 1988, 1989, 1990 as a result of the community charge legislation".

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton) replied:

"The explanatory and financial memorandum to the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Bill estimated that up to 40 additional staff will be required. This estimate remains unchanged and additional staff will be deployed to the courts as and when required."—[*Official Report*, 18 April 1988; Vol. 131, c. *324*.]

We have to face up to it that in the categories mentioned by the hon. Gentleman, as in every other category, there will be many borderline situations and there will be matters that can be resolved only in the courts. The Scottish courts are making preparations for this. What estimate has the Department of the Environment made of the extra number of courts and administrators that will be needed as a result of this legislation? Those are my two brief questions.

4.30 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) will forgive me if I comment briefly on his eloquent speech. We all sympathise with his caring attitude to those in need, particularly the elderly, but I am afraid that I cannot go along with what he had to say. First, he repeatedly referred to the community charge as a poll tax. It is not that, because already enshrined in the Bill are a number or exemptions and rebates. My argument with my hon. Friend is fundamental. I do not believe that we as a society should force members of our society with slender means into a kind of sub-culture where they are given money by society and not asked to make any contributions. That is not fair to them.

Mr. Cormack: Is my hon. Friend suggesting that those who are in receipt, sometimes as a result of great misfortune or tragedy, of income support have not made a contribution to society? Some of them have made notable contributions. The logic of his argument is that they should get nothing.

Mr. Leigh: No, that is not the logic of my argument. My hon. Friend has not heard the rest of my argument. If somebody is short of funds, rather than saying, "We shall put you on one side, we do not expect you to pay anything and we do not think you are part of society." is it not fairer to say, "We ask you to pay a modest contribution towards your community charge, say 20 per cent., and we will give you money, if necessary, to pay that contribution"? We shall not be pushing those people out of society and we shall recognise that they are part of society and involve them in the decision-making process. That is what the Bill does. It is dangerous to say to whole sections of the community, "Thou shalt not pay." I would rather deal with people in need through the rebate system.

We all sympathise with what my hon. Friend said about those aged over 80. They have made an immense contribution over the years, and what he said will, I am sure, be popular in the country. However, we as a legislature also have a duty to consider the country's needs. Is it a good idea to argue that someone who is over 80, however wealthy, should make no contribution towards the cost of local government?

Mr. Cormack: Does my hon. Friend not believe in the old adage, "No taxation without representation"?

Mr. Leigh: Of course I believe in it. That is why I want to involve all members in our society, whatever their age or the extent of their personal finances, in the decision-making and taxation processes. Therefore, I cannot accept any exemption, whether it is that in amendment No. 40 or that in amendment No. 41, which drives away whole sections of the community from the principle of paying taxes.

My hon. Friend said that he might be prepared to withdraw his amendments if my hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Local Government gave a commitment that those aged over 80 who stay with their families should not pay. Unfortunately, a commitment has already been given that those living in residential homes shall not pay.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Unfortunately?

Mr. Leigh: I do not think it is unfortunate, and I shall explain why. In Committee, I was not the only person who said this. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) said the same thing. It was brave of him to do so, because in his constituency there are many people living in residential homes who vote for him. He argued that we were giving those living in residential homes an unfair advantage, and so argued against the amendment.

One cannot solve a political problem simply by exempting one section of the community or rebating another section. We have to abide by what we believe in, and we believe that, generally speaking, everybody should be made to make some contribution to local government because everybody uses the services of local government. One of the major faults of the present rating system is that many people are not being asked to make any contribution and that is why the voting turn-out in local government elections is so small.

My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South is trying to drive a spear into the heart of the Bill by setting up new exemptions which will defeat the fundamental purpose of the Bill. For that reason I cannot support his amendments.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): There is more in common between the hon. Members for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) and for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) than the latter has just suggested. He is at least being logical. He wants to scrap the exemption for people living in residential homes, whether those homes are private or run by the local council, and I give him credit for that logic. The hon. Member for Staffordshire, South, my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and I also wish to be logical. We wish to extend the exemption, so we have something in common, although we differ about the point to which it brings us.

However, there is no logic about the Government's position, because they wish to exempt those people living in residential homes, whatever their income or wealth, simply by virtue of the fact that they live in residential homes. The hon. Member for Staffordshire, South, my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow and I agree with the Government on that, but we wish to extend it to those who live with families in the community. That is because we recognise that the way in which the Government have framed the Bill has led to there being a fiscal disincentive to remaining in the community. The Government's policy

in a different sector is to encourage care in the community. It is nonsense to say that one wishes to encourage care in the community when one then imposes a tax that will be paid only by those who live with their families in the community.

In practice, I suspect that in most cases the tax will be paid not by the elderly person living in the community but by the son or daughter of the family. In many cases, the elderly person will not be told and will not have to bother about it. In the same way, the family at present pays the rates for the dwelling in which the elderly person lives with the rest of the family. It is not true to say that these elderly people are not taxed, because they are. Everybody who lives in a house is taxed through the rating system. The hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle is nodding, so he accepts my logic. The only difference between us is where this argument takes us.

I am disappointed that the hon. Gentleman has not followed his logic through by tabling an amendment to scrap the exemption for people who live in residential homes, which is what we want to do. The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), who is not with us —I am sure he has an excellent reason for that—expressed reservations about this in Committee. However, he, too, has failed to take the opportunity to amend the Bill to put into effect his logic and that of the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle.

We are debating an amendment that has been tabled by the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South, and I wish to support that amendment. However, there is a difference between us. There is some merit in the point put to him in an intervention—that not all people over 80 need help. The answer to that is that not all people in residential homes need help. The hon. Member for Staffordshire, South should take another point into account. There is a weakness in his argument because it is not only people over 80 who need help. Many other people need help, and many pensioners between the ages of 60-65 and 80 will find themselves in similar and distressing circumstances. By introducing the threshold of over 80, he is discriminating between the two groups of pensioners.

Mr. Cormack: I am trying to get something out of the Government, but the hon. Gentleman will readily acknowledge, just as I acknowledge the arbitrary nature of any age limit, that amendment No. 41 would catch many of those people, and would help them. I have not entirely neglected his point in tabling my amendments.

Mr. Davis: I regard amendment No. 40 as the most important because it exempts completely those above the age of 80. However, coming to the hon. Gentleman's defence, there is a precedent for his amendment. The age allowance within our taxation system provides an extra personal allowance for those over the age of retirement, and it is increased for those over the age of 80. The hon. Gentleman could have produced that as a precedent if he had made a longer speech. Therefore, I follow his logic. I would support the hon. Gentleman's amendment this evening if he decided to press it to a Division.

To cure the anomaly relating to elderly people I would settle for exemption at 80; I would settle for half a loaf if I could not get the whole. This anomaly might be amended by future Governments. I have no doubt that there will be great pressure and many campaigns, especially from pensioners' organisations, to reduce the age at which exemption from poll tax comes into effect. We may well find that hon. Members on the Labour side of the House will be supporting such campaigns.

There are other anomalies in the exemptions described in clause 2 and schedule 1, as they have come from the Standing Committee, particularly in relation to prisoners. The Government wish to exempt those who have been convicted and serving sentences in prison, but those on remand awaiting trial will not be exempt from the poll tax.

Many hon. Members know that people wait for months for their trials. Some of my constituents have waited for as long as a year. If such people are in prison, after being remanded in custody awaiting trial, they are still liable to poll tax. However, if they are found guilty, as many people are after having been remanded in custody, they will be exempt from poll tax during their future sentence and for the period that they have served on remand already. However, if they are found innocent, as many of them are, and released from prison, not only have they been deprived of their liberty during the period of remand but they have to pay the poll tax because they are not exempt. That is a ridiculous anomaly. Many Members on both sides of the Standing Committee recognised that as a silly anomaly. Therefore, I commend to the House amendment No. 103, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), as it would exempt everyone who is on remand in custody. That would mean that people deprived of their liberty will be treated in exactly the same way.

I also commend to the House amendment No. 125, which would exempt those who are physically disabled and put them on the same basis as the mentally disabled. The Bill at present exempts people who are severely mentally disabled. Many of us in Standing Committee would have liked to widen the exemption to include the mentally disabled as well as the severely mentally disabled, but we lost that amendment in Committee. There is an important point to make about whether people who are mentally disabled and people who are physically disabled should be treated in the same way. I certainly support the amendment No. 125 tabled by my hon. Friends, which would remove that discrimination between mental and physical disability. If amendment No. 125 is accepted by the House, those who are mentally or physically severely disabled will be put on the same footing and will be exempt from poll tax.

Therefore, I commend all three amendments to the House.

4.45 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): This group of amendments is extensive. In view of the guillotine that has been applied to it, I shall not detain the House long, as I am sure there are other important amendments to discuss.

Amendment No. 140 and other amendments tabled by my hon. Friend require attention. We ask the Minister to consider the amendments seriously and carefully as they involve much interest and principle. We consider that amendment No. 140 cannot operate because of the number of people without a main residence, as we saw with the intervention of Mother Teresa in "cardboard city". It is difficult to understand how such people will be registered for the poll tax and who will collect it from them. We consider that clause 2(3) should be left out of the Bill, as it will not work.

[Mr. William O'Brien]

Likewise, amendment No. 222 refers to homeless people. There is much concern about the numbers of homeless. A person should be exempt from paying poll tax on any particular day if at any time on that day his sole or main residence is not a permanent structure. If these two amendments, referring to the collection of a charge from people who are not resident in accommodation that is a main structure, are not accepted, the Minister should explain how the poll tax will apply to the homeless and those without any main residence.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) touched briefly on amendments Nos. 125 to 127, which refer to the severely mentally handicapped and the question of certified people who would be exempt. This does not go far enough. The Bill in its present form provides for exemption from the community charge only for individuals who are suffering from

"arrested or incomplete development of mind."

In other words, the congenitally mentally handicapped. We consider that lines 30 to 38 in schedule 1 ought to be deleted, because numerous people suffer similar levels of mental disability through accident or disease. They are just as much disabled as those who have developed this condition of mind.

It is inequitable that someone who attains mental maturity only to lose it through an accident or disease cannot be exempt from paying a community charge while someone with a similar disability who has never achieved full development of mind receives exemption. This unequal approach to the exemption of the severely mentally handicapped should be changed. We hope that the Minister will make a statement to the effect that some consideration will be shown for people who have developed this condition through accident or disease.

Perhaps this is an example of the Government trying to restrict the concession that they have promised. We understand that promises have been made about certain concessions. If provision is not made for the numerous people who suffer mental disability through accident or disease, the Government will be seen as trying to restrict the promised concessions.

In relation to amendment No. 126, we suggest leaving out the word "certified" and inserting "deemed to be". Again, "certified" has an unacceptable inference, particularly in relation to the mentally handicapped. Its use is also contrary to accepted social service practice. To require such formalisation of the status of an individual is anti-social. The word "certified" should be taken out of this part of the Bill. The phrase "deemed to be" is more acceptable in our opinion and may allow a more flexible approach to be adopted by medical practitioners. In other words, we are of the view—and I am sure that hon. Members on the Government Benches will accept it—that consideration should be given to erasing anti-social references, such as "certified", from the Bill. We offer an alternative that we consider is more acceptable to the medical profession and those who have to deal with the mentally disabled.

Amendments Nos. 128 to 132 relate to people in full-time education, such as pupils in schools and students, including student nurses. We are still waiting for a definition of "student". There has been some question about what constitutes a person in full-time education. Should people who go on Manpower Services Commission courses after leaving school or who are engaged in community work be treated as being in full-time education, or even as students? Exemption should also be considered for people on vocational or professional training. A similar situation applies to people undergoing apprenticeships or clerkships or studying for articles in various services.

I hope that the Minister will give serious consideration to the exemption of people in full-time education and students. If students are to be exempt, a large group of the population, which is committed to vocational training, should also enjoy a similar exemption. Therefore, we would ask the Minister to take into consideration the differences between the principles being applied to the various people in full-time education who can be classed as students.

We understand that the exemption from payment of people who are continuing full-time education depends on whether child benefit is payable. Will a 19-year-old person who is continuing in full-time education but for whom no child benefit is payable also be exempt? I hope that the Minister will consider that carefully and give us some explanation or agree with the point made in the amendment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hodge Hill referred to amendment No. 103, which deals with people detained on remand. Such people do not receive services, cannot work and are not entitled to any benefit while in detention or custody, which, as has been pointed out, could continue for some considerable time. A similar situation applies to people detained for immigration reasons or awaiting deportation. Such people have no income, yet their liability to poll tax increases each day that they are detained. A person held on remand and convicted would have the time spent on remand taken into consideration when he was sentenced. We hope that the Minister will clarify such anomalies.

A question also arises with regard to the benefit payable to the partner or spouse of a person held on remand, particularly in the light of the recent changes in benefits which leave a lot to be desired. We should like the Minister to clarify how a spouse or partner will fare while a person is on remand or in custody.

In Committee, hon. Members on both sides referred to the position of people in holy orders. The Government gave undertakings to alleviate the impact of the community charge on nuns and monks. There is still no evidence that the Government intend to move on that matter. Nuns and monks are still not included in the list of exemptions. What do the Government intend to do about that?

As time is fugit and several hon. Members want to speak on other amendments, I simply ask the Minister to reply to the points that I have made on behalf of my hon. Friends, and, if possible, to give assurances that the people to whom I have referred will receive the exemption accorded to other categories referred to in the Bill.

Mr. John Hannam (Exeter): I shall be brief because of the constraints on time. I want to say a few words in support of amendments Nos. 202, 203 and 204 which stand in my name. As has been pointed out, their essence is covered by the Opposition's amendment No. 125 and partly by amendment No. 41 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack).

I fully take on board the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) that we must be careful not to extend exemptions or tax reliefs so far across the board that they undermine the essence of the original system. I see the danger of that, but this debate is dealing with categories of exemptions and I would wish to see the severely physically disabled included in the category of the severely mentally handicapped for exemption from the community charge.

I am sure that no hon. Member is unaware of the problems that the severely physically disabled face in everyday living. Their severe handicaps generally mean that a greater burden is placed upon them in seeking to live the everyday lives that we all want to see them have, and upon those who care for them. They face greater financial burdens than we have ever been able to provide for in our social security system. Even now, after the introduction of the new incomes support system, we have only a temporary bridging arrangement for the severely disabled through the trust fund being set up by the Disablement Income Group, and that is for the already most severely handicapped, not for those who will become severely disabled or handicapped after the introduction of the new scheme. Therefore, the future problems for the severely disabled are unknown and extremely worrying. Such people are unsure of their future position.

We have always hoped that by now we would have achieved a substantial general disablement costs allowance which would at least provide for all the extra costs incurred by disabled people—medical treatment, clothing, transport and care in the home. All those essential requirements are costly and place additional burdens on those who try to overcome their disabilities. We have not reached that stage and I am anxious that the community charge should not be another burden which would be counter-productive to our aim to encourage disabled people to stay in the community at home rather than in institutionalised care.

5 pm

I do not think that I need to elaborate any further today on the needs of disabled people. They are well known to all Members of the House. But it is important to remember that until the early 1970s the disabled were a basically forgotten sector of the community, living out of sight and unassisted through our systems of social provision. It has been only in the last 10 or 15 years that major efforts have been made to help them come out from behind those closed doors into everyday life, to work where possible, to join in recreational activities, to have social contacts and, above all, to live at home rather than in institutionalised care. I desperately want this progress to continue and I hope that the Minister will give sympathetic consideration to including the severely disabled in the community charge exemption category for the severely mentally handicapped.

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Michael Howard): All the amendments in this large group seek to exempt groups of individuals from the personal community charge. Before turning to the individual amendments, it may be helpful if I say a word or two about the Government's general policy on the subject and explain why wholesale exemptions of the kind proposed are unacceptable.

One of our principal aims in abolishing domestic rates and introducing the community charge is to restore local accountability. Local accountability must be restored and the only way to do it is to spread much more widely the burden of paying for community services. The community charge will achieve that aim by giving almost every member of the electorate a direct stake in how local authorities spend their money.

Of course, we accept that there are some groups of people whose circumstances are special and who should be exempted from the community charge. For the most part they are people such as the severely mentally handicapped, for whom the process of local accountability cannot satisfactorily operate. But it is quite clear, as was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), that widespread exemptions are counterproductive because they reduce the number of people who pay and therefore erode local accountability. For this reason, it is imperative that the number of exemptions is kept to a minimum.

That is not to say, of course, that help should not be made available to those who would have difficulty in paying the full community charge. We are firmly committed to giving such help, but the right way to give it is through rebates, not through exemptions. The distinction lies in the fact that even those in receipt of the maximum rebate will make a small direct contribution towards the services that they receive, and the result will be that local accountability is preserved.

Having stressed the importance of preserving local accountability, and therefore having explained our reluctance to accept further exemptions, I turn to the amendments in this group. I begin with the amendments to which reference was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack). My hon. Friend began his speech with a happy reference to Lord Broxbourne. I was delighted to hear that, because before I entered the House I was privileged to be in a professional association with Lord Broxbourne. Indeed, I thought at one stage that the reason for my hon. Friend's reference to Lord Broxbourne was not that mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) but the fact that our noble Friend is within two years of the age at which he will qualify for the exemption from the community charge that was pressed upon the House by my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South. That was clearly a powerful additional point in support of his argument.

Nevertheless, although I understand why my hon. Friend should have tabled such an amendment, and despite the fact that it was reinforced by that additional powerful consideration, I cannot, I fear, accede to his request. I hope, however, that I can reassure him that it is unnecessary.

It is, of course, important that those on low incomes, and particularly the over-80s on low incomes, should receive assistance in paying the community charge. Our proposals give that assistance, both through rebates and through the increase in income support to reflect the minimum 20 per cent. contribution. In fact, as my hon. Friend will know, pensioners, and the over-80s in particular, are more generously treated under the income support and rebate systems than younger people, and quite properly so, because their needs are greater. A single person aged 80 or over receives a special premium of £13·05 a week in the current financial year on top of the basic income support payment, and a couple with one partner, or both partners, aged 80 or over, receive a

[Mr. Michael Howard]

premium of £18·60 a week. These extra payments mean that for the over-80s the full 80 per cent. rebate will be available at significantly higher levels of income, and the rebate taper will extend further up the income scale than for others.

I think that it is clear that we have paid special attention to the needs of the over-80s. I firmly believe that the correct way to recognise those needs is through the combination of rebate and extra income support rather than through total exemption. Our preferred approach targets help more precisely to those who need it and ensures that local accountability is preserved.

Mr. Cormack: Could I just make two very brief points? First, I hope that the forms will be readily comprehensible. Secondly, and rather more seriously, would my hon. and learned Friend confirm that if even a married couple have savings of more than £6,000 they will not have the benefits to which he has referred?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend need not belittle the importance of the first point, because it is a very serious one. I very much hope that the forms that will be available will be simple and comprehensible to those whom they are designed to help. On his second point, confirmation was given during the debate yesterday, at which I know my hon. Friend was present, that that is indeed the position.

It was argued, although in a modest way, by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), among others, that the exemption for old people in homes creates an anomaly and a disincentive to care in the community. This is an argument to which I responded in Committee, and I am glad to explain once again why we do not believe that it will pose a problem.

The first point to bear in mind is that those in residential care in nursing homes receive special treatment at present. Most receive rate relief, which is not available to old people living in their own homes. When the Abolition of Domestic Rates (Scotland) Act 1987 was considered in Parliament there was strong pressure for continuing that special treatment. In response, the Government agreed that those being cared for in such institutions should be exempted from liability to pay the personal community charge. If there is a disincentive effect, therefore, it is one that operates at present.

I do not believe that there will be such an effect. Arguably, if an elderly person with a low income had to pay the full community charge in his home and pay nothing in an institution, that might influence the decision whether to stay within the community. But that is not the choice that most elderly, infirm or disabled people will face. Those on low incomes who remain resident in the community will be eligible for rebates. A single pensioner or a pensioner couple, for example, with no income other than the state retirement pension would qualify for an 80 per cent. rebate, plus an increase in income support payment to reflect the 20 per cent. contribution. That means that, in an area with the average community charge, there would be no financial incentive whatever.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: If the hon. Gentleman will wait until I have finished my explanation, I will give way to him.

In an area with the average community charge there would be no financial incentive whatever, one way or the other. In a high-spending area there might be a relatively small advantage in removing to an institution, but in a low-spending area there would be a slight advantage the other way. But it is most unlikely, as the hon. Member for Linlithgow, I think, acknowledged, that this tiny financial advantage would influence the choice between care within the community and care in an institution.

The hon. Gentleman sought to suggest that there might be a deterrent to those who were considering welcoming into their homes an aunt or uncle, or a relative of that kind. I believe that that point, too, was misconceived because, as he will be aware, the 20 per cent. community charge for someone on income support would be personal to that individual and would not fall on other members of the family in the way that the hon. Gentleman was suggesting.

In the case of the better-off over-80s also a community charge liability is most unlikely to play any part in this decision. A pensioner with a small occupational pension, for example, would be most unlikely to gain in any way as a result of moving into a residential care home since he or she would have to contribute virtually all his or her income towards the cost of the care and accommodation in the home. Any gain from being exempt from the community charge would be dwarfed by the overall financial consequences of the decision to move into the home. For all those reasons, I do not think that there would be any significant effect whatever on this decision.

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister accept that he misrepresents the position in two ways? First, he misrepresents it by suggesting that a typical elderly person living with a family would be eligible for the maximum rebate. Will he confirm that someone who had an elderly person living in the family home and fairly modest personal assets would be liable for the full community charge, and that therefore there would be a considerable incentive for someone at present paying domestic rates to get that elderly person into residential accommodation?

Secondly, does the Minister accept that it is again a misrepresentation to imply that there is no difference between the present position, in that there will be no rates to pay in residential accommodation, and the new position? If a couple and an elderly relative are living together in a family home, they are not put at a disadvantage, compared with residential accommodation, but the poll tax, when they will have three charges to pay rather than one, will create a disincentive. The Churches and everybody who is concerned with the care of the elderly has acknowledged that the Bill contains a strong incentive to get elderly people out of the family home and into residential accommodation. That is part of the reason why the poll tax is an anti-family tax.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is wrong on both counts. If there is concern, it is based on a misunderstanding. He is wrong about his first question. If a pensioner had assets, when he or she moved into a residential home his assets would be required to be applied towards discharging the costs of the care and accommodation that he received in that home. There would not, therefore, be any incentive of the kind to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

The hon. Gentleman is also wrong about his second point, for the reason that I gave earlier: that it is the pensioner and the pensioner alone who would be liable for any liability there may be to the community charge, be it 20 per cent. or greater. That liability would not fall on other members of the family.

Mr. Wilson: Does the Minister not accept that he is using theory to justify legislation but that the reality is very different? If the Minister believes that an elderly person within the family unit makes that payment as an individual and does not realise that it forms part of the household calculations, he is living in a different world from that in which I and most elderly people live.

Mr. Howard: I am glad that on this occasion I gave way to the hon. Gentleman. His question highlights one of the ways in which the Government's proposals are being fundamentally misrepresented. When those misrepresentations are corrected, as I have sought to do in the last few minutes, the answer from the Opposition is not that the Government's position is inaccurate but that it is a matter of theory. That is absurd. The answers that I gave the hon. Gentleman were not in any sense based on theory; they were based on the precise provisions of this legislation. It is only by departing from and misrepresenting the Government's legislative provisions that the Opposition have been able to engender the concern and the anxiety on which they rely in opposing the proposals.

Mr. Terry Davis: Will the Minister confirm that if an elderly person now goes to live with another member of his family there is no increase in rates or in any other form of taxation but that if in future an elderly person goes to live with another member of his family there will be an increase in tax because that elderly person will be liable to the poll tax? If, however, that elderly person went into residential accommodation that was provided either by his council or privately he would not be liable to the poll tax.

Mr. Howard: The answer is that there will be no increase for those who are already resident in that property. That is the relevant point, if we are considering deterrence.

Mr. Terry Davis: Answer the question.

Mr. Howard: I must answer the two questions that were put to me by the hon. Member for Linlithgow. It follows from the fact, as I have demonstrated, that there is no incentive of the kind to which he referred that no estimate has been made of the additional number of people who will move into residential homes. We do not think that that will arise. The hon. Gentleman also asked specifically about the effect on the courts. In England and Wales, disputes as to whether a person should be registered for the personal community charge will be matters for the tribunals—the local valuation courts, reconstituted under the relevant schedule to the Bill as valuation and community charge tribunals. In the explanatory and financial memorandum to the Bill we estimate that tribunals might need an additional 160 staff. They will be needed to deal with the effects of the non-domestic revaluation as well as matters concerning the community charge.

5.15 pm

As for the second of the exemptions that my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South wants, he seeks an exemption from the personal community charge for those in receipt of income support. Again we think that an exemption of that kind would be unnecessary and counter-productive. It would undermine local accountability. Comprehensive assistance will be available to all those in receipt of income support.

Without exception, all those in receipt of income support will be entitled to a reduction of 80 per cent. of their full community charge liability. They will therefore have to pay only 20 per cent. of the charge set by their local authority. What is more, income support levels will be increased to help recipients pay their 20 per cent. contribution. That increase will be based on the national average community charge. In areas such as that which my hon. Friend represents, where the community charge is lower than the national average, income support recipients will be slightly better off under the Government's proposals than they would be under the full exemption. That is a point upon which my hon. Friend will have to reflect.

The hon. Members for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) and for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) referred to the position of prisoners held on remand. There was a vigorous Committee debate on this subject. Since then we have been reflecting on the arguments that were put to us and on the arguments that have been presented this afternoon. The case is not so clear-cut as has sometimes been suggested by the Opposition, but I accept that in some quarters there is considerable disquiet on the point. I shall therefore consider the points that have been made in the debate and will consult my colleagues and then report back to the House on the possibility of extending the exemption to cover prisoners on remand.

Amendments Nos. 125 to 137, 202 to 204 and 208 are all concerned with the mentally or physically handicapped. Again these matters were exhaustively debated in Committee. We accept that those who are severely mentally handicapped and for whom accountability, the touchstone of this Bill, cannot operate should be exempt. There is a question as to how the phrase "severely mentally handicapped" should be defined for this purpose. As drafted, the Bill limits the definition to those who are

"suffering from a state of arrested or incomplete development of mind."

Strong concern was voiced in Committee that this definition was too narrow and that it did not cover those who become severely mentally handicapped in adulthood.

In view of the concern that was expressed in Committee, I said that I would reconsider the definition in consultation with my colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Security and the Scottish Office. Discussions are continuing between the Departments concerned. It is a difficult issue and we need to make sure that we get it absolutely right. I am afraid, therefore, that I am not in a position to announce the Government's decision on that matter today, but I shall do so as soon as possible.

Mr. O'Brien: In addition to the DHSS representatives, does the Minister intend to consult the organisations that are looking after the mentally and physically handicapped?

Mr. Howard: The proper way forward is for the Government to produce their formula. When we come before Parliament with that formula, I am sure that those organisations will make their views known, and that at that stage they will be taken fully into account.

[Mr. Howard]

Amendment No. 126 also deals with a point that I agreed in Committee to consider. We envisage that one of the requirements that would have to be met before exemption could be claimed is a doctor's certificate. In Committee, however, hostility was expressed to the wording of paragraph 4(1)(c), which refers not specifically to a certificate but to someone being

"certified as severely mentally handicapped."

I said that we would look again at the wording of that phrase. We shall certainly do so. But it seems sensible first to see what the definition of "severely mentally handicapped" should be and what the criteria might be for claiming the exemption and then to look at the form of words used.

Amendment No. 125 is rather wider in scope and I am afraid that I cannot extend to that amendment my offer of consideration that I made on the other two points. Amendment 125 seeks to exempt all those who are receiving severe disablement allowance. Because that allowance is paid to the physically handicapped, as well as those who are mentally handicapped, the amendment would change the whole purpose of the exemption. Amendments 202, 203 and 204 would also have the effect of exempting the physically handicapped, and must also —as I hope to persuade the House, despite the very persuasive advocacy to the contrary of my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam)—be rejected.

As I explained in Committee, we do not believe it would be right to exempt the physically handicapped from the community charge. The community charge is specifically intended to extend to all adults. The exemptions are tightly drawn, and are—as I have already explained—based on the criterion of accountability. It would be untrue and, indeed, demeaning to those affected to claim that, because someone was physically handicapped, he or she could not play a full part in the widening of accountability which the community charge will bring.

Mr. Wilson: How can the Minister defend what he is doing to the physically handicapped on the ground that it would demean them not to be able to pay a charge which many of them are not in a position to earn? Why in this section of the debate has he started talking about "the disabled" as a generic term rather than with the distinction —however odious it is to some of us—which has been drawn in terms of the mentally handicapped? It is surely possible within the legislation for the most severely physically handicapped people in our society not to be subjected to this charge. How can the Minister suggest that he is doing these people a favour by making them pay?

Mr. Howard: I do not think that extending exemptions, which are related to the touchstone of accountability, would be the right thing to do for many of the disabled who are able to play a full part in local and national politics. It is no good the hon. Gentleman protesting in the way in which he does. He knows perfectly well that people who are disabled in this way are in receipt of special help, and their means will be taken into account in assessing their ability to pay the community charge and their entitlement to rebate. They will have their particular circumstances fully taken into account in that way, which is a more effective way than full exemption.

The hon. Member for Normanton referred to those amendments which seek to provide an exemption for members of religious communities. The hon. Gentleman may not have seen it, but we have already announced in a written answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) on 31 March that we intend to provide for just such an exemption.

The amendment, which we intend to bring forward in another place, will exempt from the community charge members of religious communities, the principal occupation of which is prayer, contemplation, the relief of suffering, education, or such other activities as may be prescribed. The exemption will extend only to those members of religious communities who have no income or capital of their own. A similar amendment will be brought forward to take account of religious communities in Scotland.

The hon. Member for Normanton also referred to people who were in receipt of occupational training. He suggested that they should be regarded as being in a similar category—if I have understood him correctly—to those people who were still at school. I do not think that that would be a sensible course to take, because of the obvious differences between the two categories.

Those people who are still at school but are over the age of 19 are in a very similar position—usually they are retaking A-levels or something of that kind—to other full-time students who, instead of staying at school, go to college to retake their examinations. They will almost certainly be eligible for the maximum rebate. They play a full part in the democratic process and we think that is a sensible way of dealing with them. Those who remain at school, and are under the age of 19, will be exempt in accordance with the provisions which are already in the legislation.

Finally, I come to amendments Nos. 140 and 222, which would delete the provision that a person can be subject to the personal community charge whether or not he lives in a building, and add a provision that a person is exempt if his sole or main residence is not a permanent structure.

These amendments would be unfair and discriminatory in their operation. They might, for example, result in an exemption for people who have their sole or main residence in mobile homes. Such a result would be intolerable. Most local authority services relate to people —not to property. That is one reason why we have decided to introduce a personal charge in place of a property tax. That is why I urge the House to reject that amendment also.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): This is a bit like the afternoon after the night before. The voices are calmer, the sense of tension is less and we hope that perhaps the Minister feels less under attack and a little more generous. He has told us a couple of things about the proposals, which he said in Committee he would accept, and on which he would announce his decisions today. He has now told us that these decisions have been deferred, although they will be made. We are grateful for that, but we need to push on the substance behind the amendments which we have been debating. The issue, although it has been approached in a different way from last night, is again: who should pay and who should not? Exemptions are about who should not. The Government are still

holding their position—with certain exemptions which they admit—that everyone should pay a flat rate. They say that that is necessary for accountability, and that that is the principle that they believe to be right.

The Government have already accepted 10 categories of exemption. They are contained in schedule 1. Some of these amendments, which the Minister has not yet accepted—including some which stand in my name and the names of my hon. Friends—are tabled to clear up anomalies that arise from these definitions. There is an anomaly, for example, relating to prisoners. My belief is that, if there is a fair system, one would not continually need to add further categories of exemption. I agree largely with the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) that the way to deal with how people should be taxed should not always be to look for categories which one thinks it is either politic or in another way expedient to exempt. That manifests the unfairness of the proposal as a whole. Therefore, I do not argue for general political or expedient exemptions for large categories and, indeed, I have not tabled any amendments to do that. I have sought to tidy up some of the anomalies in the exemptions which have been put forward by the Government. I do not otherwise create great groups of people who should be exempt from the system.

5.30 pm

I say to the Minister—and it is interesting that this was the area on which most time was spent—that although, with his colleagues, he was resisting the banded community charge, it would perhaps help his colleagues, and his party generally, to look at the system that I and my colleagues propose—local income tax. The Minister may have seen in the papers yesterday that we have produced our response to his figures, which were produced a couple of months ago. In that response, we explain how local income tax should work. I have brought this response to the House for the Minister's consideration. Perhaps I can leave it with him. I am serious about asking the Minister to look at that response, and I am sure that he will. I shall not go into a great explanation, but the key point is that many of the assumptions in the Government's proposals are their own and would not apply under a properly worked out system.

I will now illustrate relatively briefly the important points about exemptions, as opposed to people who will pay. Often in this House the best one can do is to choose examples which are relatively parochial to oneself. I shall compare some of the exemptions that are not to be granted with some of the figures that people will pay. I shall take my own borough because, as the Minister knows, it is relevant.

On the Government's figures, the average poll tax will be £570 per person, which is the sixth highest projected poll tax in the country. That is based on current expenditure. Using that figure as the starting point, one can then look at how the tax will affect certain categories of people in a borough such as Southwark. I do not need to continue in great length, but it is a borough with great social problems and discrepancies in wealth and income. Southwark contains people in all the categories that we are discussing today.

I want to put to the Minister, in more graphic form, concern that has been expressed about the way in which the exemptions and the full rates would work as presently proposed. I refer to an unsolicited letter that was written to me by somebody in Rotherhithe. The letter, dated 11 February, states:

> "As one of your constituents, I am writing to ask you just how my family and I will stand in the event of the poll tax being passed. I am a widow with two daughters, who are both over 18 and working, and one son who will be leaving school this year.
>
> I have read that the poll tax could be as much as £500 per person in Southwark. That would make £1,500 from this household."

That is an underestimate because, as I have stated, the poll tax would be more than £500. The letter continues:

> "Could you confirm that these figures are correct, and what, if anything, can be done to stop the Bill being passed?"

The answer to that second question is now more apparent. The letter then states:

> "To say that I am concerned is an understatement."

That is the sort of concern that people have about the way in which the system, as currently proposed, will work. The result will be the sort of figures that I shall give for both the actual poll tax and the exemptions. My hon. Friends and I would argue that one could propose a local income tax rate of 6·8 per cent. On that basis, allowing for the rebate that the Government have conceded, a student nurse would pay a poll tax of £511. I should point out that there are many student nurses in Southwark at Guy's hospital. I repeat that that is allowing for the rebates. However, under the alternative system that we propose, that student nurse could pay £164. Under the Government's proposals, a one-earner couple would pay £1,140 in poll tax; we say that that need be only £362.

I now give three examples of hon. Members who live in Southwark and who are appropriate examples. On the basis of my parliamentary salary of £22,548, I would pay £570 in poll tax. My local income tax would be £1,368. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), who has just moved into my constituency and lives in a property that is about four times the value of mine, would pay, with his wife, a poll tax of £1,140. I am told that his local income tax would be £1,275. The Prime Minister, who has a salary of £51,068—she does not take the additional amount; only the Cabinet salary—would, with her husband, pay £1,140 in poll tax, just like the hon. Member for Dagenham and his wife, whereas under any fair system of income tax the Prime Minister and her husband would pay about £3,215—more than the hon. Member for Dagenham, myself, the student nurse or the one-earner couple. I do not think that anybody would object to that or criticise it as being unfair.

We should compare that with the position of the people whom we seek to exempt. A debate will follow shortly on our first proposal relating to student nurses. I know that the Minister is making some concessions on that. I take the view not that all student nurses should be exempt, but that all those in training should be treated in the same way. I know that there is a later amendment, tabled by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and his hon. Friends, and I shall support it. Such exemptions should apply across the board. There is an anomaly at the moment because some people studying some subjects will be exempt or will qualify for the 80 per cent. rebate, but others will not.

Mr. Leigh: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Hughes: Perhaps we can come to the hon. Gentleman's point in the next but one debate, which is specifically about that matter.

Mr. Leigh *rose*——

Mr. Hughes: I should like to deal with the other exemptions.

There is still an anomaly about people who have been severely disabled in accidents. The Minister said that he would think about that, but he did undertake to have done so by today. I ask the Minister to consider my amendment seriously, because it seems completely unfair that somebody whose disability is not congenital but derives from an accident, such as a motor or industrial accident, should be treated differently from other disabled people. If people are to be exempt because they have a disability and cannot profit from or contribute to the process of democracy in the same way as anyone else, I ask that all such people be given the same treatment.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) made a point about remand prisoners. There is a strong argument for saying that somebody who is in prison does not benefit from local authority services in any way because he or she benefits from other services. However, if that person is then let off as a remand prisoner, it is ludicrous that he or she should have to pay the poll tax when a person who is convicted at the same time would not have to pay.

The Minister has suggested that people in religious orders, in the categories that he defined, will be exempt. There is an amendment in my name to that effect, and I am grateful to the Minister for what he said. That seems entirely consistent with the argument that if one does not have any money, one should not have to pay. We are referring to people who, by their vows and profession, do not have the money to pay.

The last category, which the Minister has so far resisted, is that of homeless people. My colleagues and I take the view that if someone does not have the ability to pay, he or she should not be within the system. I accept that there may be a drafting problem with that, but the Government's proposal would include people—not those in mobile homes, but others, examples of whom were given in Committee—who are homeless and who sleep in the underground subway at the Elephant and Castle or by the dustbins of the Tooley street hostel, which is on the other side of the river from the City, and people who do not have a place of residence. They cannot be expected to pay the poll tax, although they are at present. It is currently proposed that inspectors should be sent to collect the poll tax from people sleeping in doorways, who, even if they were found and identified, would hardly be likely to have anything in their pocket to contribute in the first place.

Mr. Leigh *rose*——

Mr. Hughes: No, I shall not give way. I should like to proceed quickly, because I know that other hon. Members wish to contribute.

So far as the other amendments are concerned, it follows consistently that my attitude and that of my colleagues is that we should not exempt all those over 80. Some people over 80 have an adequate ability to pay. However, I support the amendment of the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) that those in receipt of income support should be exempt because, by definition, they do not have enough income from any source to enable them to do without support from the state. The Minister knows—he has suggested this today, but I want to repeat it so that he understands it as a practicality—that in my borough, which will probably be the sixth highest poll tax-paying borough in the country, we shall have a higher than average rate. The 80 per cent. rebate will cover those on income support who are at the bottom of the income scale and there will be assistance on the basis of the average across the country, but that will leave a shortfall. The Minister knows that that means that everybody in a borough such as mine will have to pay a poll tax bill, however small their income and however much it has been accepted in the past that they will have support from the state because they cannot afford to pay more.

Full-time school pupils should be exempt because they are not in the category of adult contributor to and beneficiaries from the community. Those who do not pay income tax should not pay the poll tax because they come in an income level below those from whom we think that society should take. The principle seems clear. I hope that at the end of the debate, and at the end of the series of debates on exemptions, we can re-establish the principle that exemptions should be not just for those who cannot contribute to the process, but for those who cannot afford to pay for the process in which, for the time being, they are beneficiaries.

I ask the Minister to look specificially at the two remaining amendments which have not yet received his confirmation and approbation—the amendments relating to remand prisoners and those who become disabled later in life but who are not disabled from birth.

We still look to the Government to accede to the view that we should still change the Bill, but it should still be made into a legislative framework for raising money for local services on the basis of ability to pay.

I conclude with two sentences from a letter from another constituent who knows what the Government are proposing. The letter states:

"Dear Mr. Hughes

I would like to express my concern about the proposed poll tax . . . The Government ie Mrs. Thatcher seems to bulldoze her every whim on the British public!"

My constituents understand. I hope that the Minister will understand that he needs to respond in good time, not just for the sake of people in Southwark, but possibly for many Conservative Members who are listening to the debate.

Mr. Ralph Howell: While I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) on the motives behind his amendment and fully understand what he is trying to do to help those who are over 80 who have not got great resources, I am unable to support him. No category like that should be excluded because it includes all sorts of people, like the late Sir Charles Clore and Paul Getty, who would not have needed help.

My principal reason for intervening is to try to persuade Ministers to think again about the whole concept of the unfairness of the community charge and to commend to them amendment No. 5 which I tabled. Then they would be able to sleep peacefully in their beds——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman is about to deal with an amendment which has not been selected because it is out

of order. I am sure that with his ingenuity he will be able to bring his remarks within the scope of the amendments which have been selected for debate.

Mr. Howell: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was trying to say that rather than go down the route which my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South has suggested, there is a way in which we could solve the problem without these strange demarcation lines and exemptions.

I do not believe that there should be exemptions. That is why I suggest to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench a system which would solve the problem. I hope that I am in order if I discuss a proposition for a supplement on VAT. It might be called a local government tax. I understand that we would need about 6 per cent. extra on VAT, making it 21 per cent., to raise the amount of money which the Government wish to collect from the community charge—a system which will work unfairly in the opinion of hon. Members on both sides of the House. Under the system which I propose there would be no need for exemptions, extra staff, registration or prosecutions because there would be no fraud. The system would be painless. It would mean that we could abolish the unsatisfactory rating system which we have and also avoid the even more unsatisfactory system which is proposed by the Government.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): What the Minister has said is not likely to satisfy the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack). I would describe the Minister's speech as a cogent form of Ridleyspeak. It is always more interesting to listen to the Minister than to the Secretary of State; nevertheless, the Minister made it clear that there is to be no concession. If there had been a free vote on the principle of the poll tax, no doubt the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) would have supported the Government, but he would have been in a minority. If he wishes to take my remarks as a compliment, he may do so.

If the amendment relating to the over-80s were accepted, there would be anomalies. Some people over 80 have substantial means, but the large majority have not. The position is made much worse because anyone who happens to have accumulated over £6,000 is denied assistance. That is almost impossible to believe. Since the war, and probably before the war too, successive Governments have urged people to save. Yet what happens? If, having reached retirement age, they have accumulated the tremendous sum of just over £6,000, which may include redundancy money and which may have meant many sacrifices, they are denied housing benefit, and they will be denied assistance with the poll tax. That is why it is unacceptable.

I am totally opposed to the poll tax. That will come as no surprise to the Minister and his colleagues. However, I will support any amendment such as that moved by the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South, which would make the poll tax that bit less offensive, obnoxious and less likely to cause hardship to people in need.

5.45 pm

The hon. Member for Staffordshire, South should be careful. According to some of the newspapers on Sunday, the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates), which was debated yesterday, was described as a sinister plot for power initiated by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine). It could not, I think, have been a coincidence. The *Observer* story said:

"Poll tax rift is plot for power."

That was one newspaper. When I got to *The Sunday Times*, it had virtually the same story. It stated:

"Ministers alleged yesterday that the rebels were motivated by hostility to the Government and that Michael Heseltine was the prime influence behind the uprising."

I can only conclude that No. 10 had been very active over the weekend, that Mr. Bernard Ingham was doing overtime, that there was a co-ordinated attempt to smear anyone on the Government side who was critical of the poll tax and that the obvious way of undermining the potential revolt was to describe it as a sinister plot by the right hon. Member for Henley to get into No. 10. It did not work yesterday. The Government had their smallest majority in this Parliament, and they cannot be happy about what happened.

There is tremendous fear among people, not least the elderly, about what the poll tax will mean. Much of that fear is justified. The whole concept of a tax without account being taken of people's ability to pay is novel and wrong. As I have said, I am only too willing to support any amendment which will help to ensure protection for people who will be penalised by the poll tax.

What an odd position it is. Before the Government came to office, it would have been unthinkable that any Government would introduce a tax which would require a pensioner to pay the same as a multi-millionaire, with the pensioner not being allowed any assistance if he had savings of over £6,000.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): What about road fund tax?

Mr. Winnick: This is a form of taxation. The hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) makes the weakest possible case. If he believes that the poll tax is right and proper, surely the next step for him is to suggest that everyone should pay the same rate of income tax. The hon. Member for Pembroke could not persuade many of his colleagues to support the Government last night. If there were a free vote, clearly he would be in a minority on his side.

I hope that the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South will put his amendment to the vote. If he does, I will support it. It is a step in the right direction. Anything which would protect people from this obnoxious tax should be supported.

Mr. Cormack: With the leave of the House, I can assure the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) that neither the Patronage Secretary nor any of his colleagues has been anything other than courteous to me. Not one has sought to dissuade me from my long-held personal convictions expressed over a long period on this issue.

We have had an interesting debate and I know that it is the wish of the House to proceed to debates on other subjects of importance. I understand that the Opposition would prefer not to take up time by dividing on this; I understand that, because the guillotine places great constraints on us. It would be dishonest of me to seek leave to withdraw the amendment, because my hon. and learned Friend the Minister, who gave a typically courteous reply, did not meet any of the points that I advanced.

The spectre of £6,000 will haunt the Government until something is done about it. As on many previous

[Mr. Cormack]

occasions, I am content to say that our help is in the Lords and to allow the amendment to be negatived, but I am not content to seek leave to withdraw it.

Amendment negatived.

Clause 5

PERSONS SUBJECT TO COLLECTIVE COMMUNITY CHARGE

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I beg to move, amendment No. 141, in page 4, line 45, at end insert—

'(8) A registration officer shall seek only such information as he may reasonably require in connection with his functions.'.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 142, in clause 6, page 5, line 2, at beginning insert

'After consulting his employing charging authority as to the implications for civil liberties of compiling and maintaining a community charge register and having regard to any code or codes of practice which may be issued by the local authority associations and the National Council for Civil Liberties,'.

No. 2, in page 5, line 2, after '(1)', insert,

'In accordance with subsection (1A) below.'.

No. 3, in page 5, line 4, at end insert,

'(1A) The registration officer shall perform his duties under this section in accordance with a code of practice drawn up by the Secretary of State in consultation with local authority representatives and the National Council for Civil Liberties.'.

No. 210, in page 5, line 35, leave out from 'duty' to end of line 36 and insert

'to take all reasonable steps to obtain such information as is reasonably required by him.'

No. 211, in page 5, line 36, at end add—

'(9) The registration officer shall be responsible for ensuring that the register remains the property of the charging authority and that no part of it is sold by the charging authority or any of its employees.'.

No. 212, in page 5, line 6, at end add—

'(9) A registration officer's duty to compile and maintain a register shall not include the power to cross reference the register with any electoral register.'.

No. 152, in clause 21, page 13, line 33, at end insert—

'(3) Schedule *(Personal Data)* below (which contains provisions about the collection, retention and disclosure of information) shall have effect.'

No. 167, in schedule 2, page 82, line 3, leave out 'any' and insert 'the'.

No. 167A, in page 82, line 3, after 'information' insert 'set out in paragraph 16'.

No. 138, in page 82, line 29, leave out paragraph 11.

No. 213, in page 84, line 6, at end insert—

'(1A) The regulations may include provision that a person shown in a charging authority's register may have access to any supporting files or documentary evidence regarding themselves held by the registration officer for the purposes of determining that person's liability to a community charge of the authority.'.

No. 149, in page 84, leave out lines 10 to 16 and insert—

'(3) The extract and list shall not be copied and supplied to any person for any purpose other than for the purpose of administering the collection of the community charge and related purposes specified in this Act.'.

No. 139, in page 85, line 5, at end insert—

'21. In the course of carrying out his duties under the provisions of this Act a Registration officer shall not request or record the following descriptions of information—

(i) police or criminal records,
(ii) social work records,
(iii) records held by the health authorities,
(iv) Inland Revenue records,
(v) records on the local authorities own employees held for employment purposes, and records of job applicants.'.

No. 153, new schedule—*Personal Data*—

'1. Information in the form of personal data which is held by the Registration Officer shall be obtained and processed fairly and lawfully.

2. Information in the form of personal data which is held by the Registration Officer shall be held only for the purposes of this Act.

3. Information in the form of personal data which is held by the Registration Officer shall not be used or disclosed in any manner incompatible with the purposes of this Act.

4. Information in the form of personal data which is held by the Registration Officer shall be adequate, relevant and not excessive in relation to the purposes of this Act.

5. Information in the form of personal data which is held by the Registration Officer shall be accurate and, where necessary, up to date and shall not be kept for any longer than is necessary for the purposes of this Act.

6. Appropriate security measures shall be taken against unauthorised access to, or alteration, or disclosure or destruction of, information which is in the form of personal data and which is held by the Registration Officer and against accidental loss or destruction of such information.

7. An individual shall be entitled—

(a) at reasonable intervals and without undue delay or expense—

(i) to be informed by the Registration Office whether he holds information in the form of personal data of which the individual is the subject; and

(ii) to access to any such information held by the Registration Officer save that such access may be refused where necessary for the purposes of the prevention or detection of crime.

8. The Registration Officer shall neither request nor hold information in the form of personal data, which falls within the following description of information—

(i) Police or criminal records,
(ii) Medical records,
(iii) Social work records,
(iv) Education records,
(v) Employment records,
(vi) records of any individual under the age of 18, or
(vii) information relating to housing benefit or housing allocation which is of a sensitive personal nature.

9. Any individual who suffers damage or distress as a result of the breach of any of the provisions of paragraphs 1 to 9 of this Schedule shall be entitled to compensation from the Registration Officer for that damage or distress unless the Registration Officer was not negligent in permitting or causing the breach.

10. For the purposes of this Schedule "personal data" means information—howsoever recorded—which relates to a living individual who can be identified from that information (or from that and other information in the possession of the Registration Officer), including any expression of opinion about the individual.

11. Nothing in this Schedule shall affect the rights of any data subject under the Data Protection Act 1984, as defined by that Act, save that for the purposes of that Act the Community Charge is not a tax.'.

Dr. Cunningham: I shall also address my remarks to amendments Nos. 142 and 152, which is a paving amendment for amendment No. 153, which is the major amendment in this group. It sets out a new schedule embodying our views about privacy, personal data and the need to have some comprehensive safeguards written into the Bill to protect individuals and families from unnecessary intrusion into their personal lives and personal affairs, and to protect them from the use of these sensitive data by other people when the poll tax register is compiled, and perhaps available for sale for commercial purposes. Amendment No. 153 embodies the data protection issues which we should like to see written into the Bill.

Many British people have always objected to personal information relating to them or their families being collected and held by anyone, whether by Government, local government or an agency. It is felt, understandably, to be an invasion of privacy that someone else can read about the details of our private lives. Such information should be kept only when absolutely essential for the proper administration of our affairs. Only those with good reason to hold such information should be able to do so or to have access to it.

In particular, many people think it undesirable that the state should know the private details of the lives of individual citizens. There is a further closely related objection to holding large amounts of personal data, which is that the use of the information can, either intentionally or otherwise, cause distress or harm to the person to whom it relates.

For many years, many organisations, political parties and individual Members of Parliament—first and foremost in this is the National Council for Civil Liberties—have received complaints from people who have suffered as a result of the information about them being disclosed without their consent, often without them having any knowledge of such disclosures. Obviously, I know of that from my experience, as I expect other hon. Members do, of seeing in my surgery constituents who have suffered in exactly this way. Notwithstanding yesterday's vote, the Government seem hellbent on proceeding with this awful legislation. That is all the more reason why some specific and detailed safeguard on these issues should be written into the Bill.

The public are well aware of the threat that these proposals pose to them. Recently, Marketing Opinion Research International carried out a survey of opinion on this matter for Manchester city council, which showed that 76 per cent. of those questioned believed that the poll tax would involve officials snooping and intruding into their personal affairs and family lives.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will the hon. Gentleman tell us in what precise terms the question was posed?

Dr. Cunningham: No. I cannot—*[Laughter.]* Hon. Members laugh, but I was about to say that I cannot give the hon. Lady that specific reply now but that I can furnish her with a full copy of the survey and the results, if she wishes. That shows that one should bring with one every document to which one refers. I hope that she will accept that the survey was properly conducted with a large sample and I assure her that the reputation and professional standing of the company is beyond question. It was a properly conducted survey of opinion carried out professionally.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: By whom?

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Lady cannot have been listening to me. I said that the survey was carried out by Market Opinion Research International, which is MORI for short. I am more than happy to let her see a copy of the full document if it will help to convince her of the result.

We know that the poll tax will not be a tax or duty within the meaning of section 28 of the Data Protection Act 1984. That assurance was given to us in Committee by the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment. Therefore, it is pertinent to ask why the Government do not agree that the data protection principles should be enshrined in the Bill in a declaratory manner, as we are suggesting. That is what amendment No. 153 is mainly about.

In addition, paragraph 8 of the new schedule ensures:

"The Registration Officer shall neither request nor hold information in the form of personal data, which falls within the following description of information—

(i) Police or criminal records,
(ii) Medical records,
(iii) Social work records,
(iv) Education records,
(v) Employment records,
(vi) records of any individual under the age of 18, or
(vii) information relating to housing benefit or housing allocations which is of a sensitive personal nature."

The Government have given us no assurances on those matters. Ministers say that these matters will be covered by secondary legislation which will come before the Houss in due course. I cannot see the argument for proceeding in that way, and it remains unconvincing. What is the argument against writing these guarantees of personal privacy into the Bill? There is an overwhelming case for saying that the House should do so.

The Department of the Environment and Welsh Office yellow document, "The Community Charge", was published in December 1986. Page 10, paragraph 32, states:

"The only sources of local authority information that will not be accessible to the registration officer will be those that contain material of great personal sensitivity—social workers' casework files, for example, and information held by the police."

[Dr. Cunningham]

That is a much narrower statement than what is set out in paragraph 8 of the new schedule, but even the assurance that the Government gave in that publication is not in the Bill itself.

6 pm

We know from other disclosures since the Bill left Committee that other interference in privacy and civil liberties is guaranteed by what the Government propose to do. In a recent letter to me, the Minister for Local Government confirmed that, so that students can be "correctly and readily identified" for the purposes of the poll tax, they will have to carry personal identity cards. That is a serious step down a dangerous road.

We know that Ministers are under pressure from their own colleagues in local government—that is, Conservative councillors—to ensure that every adult over 18 is personally identified in some way by the allocation of either a personal identity number or a card. That information was contained in the minutes of a meeting of the Conservative-controlled Association of District Councils policy committee on 20 January this year. So we know that pressure is building up in the Conservative party for more and more information to be held about people and for more and more national means of identifying and checking on them for the purposes of poll tax collection and registration.

It has even been suggested by the same group of Conservative councillors and others that people presenting themselves with applications for benefit under the new social security system will have to demonstrate that they are registered for poll tax before they can even be allowed to have benefit. That is another intrusion into people's privacy.

All those matters need to be dealt with and safeguards need to be given to people by specifically writing guarantees into the legislation. I do not believe that it is acceptable or even sensible for those things to be dealt with in a piecemeal way and for those matters to come before the House in dribs and drabs, as Ministers apparently intend. They should be put into the Bill itself before it leaves this House.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): I strongly support amendment No. 153, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham).

The House should be concernd, as it has been on occasions, about the relationship between any information collected for poll tax purposes and information that is already available on the electoral register—hence the name "poll tax", which will be attached to the tax for as long as it is in existence. I am concerned about the security of the information that may be collected for the poll tax register because at present the security for information on electoral registers is inadequate. Electoral registers are available to any type of organisation that wants to buy and use them for any purpose.

The House may be interested to know that last year I took part in a survey that was directed at about one fifth of local authorities—84 in total, including London boroughs, metropolitan, Welsh and English districts. The survey tried to discover what use people made of the electoral registers, other than for the agreed purpose of establishing people's entitlement to vote. It will not come as a surprise to any hon. Member who has ever taken an interest in these matters that no fewer than 93 per cent. of the local authorities that we surveyed sold their electoral registers indiscriminately.

We all know what electoral registers can be used for. They are used for junk mail or by debt collection agencies. We know well enough some of the methods used by those agencies. The registers are used by private detective agencies and by a whole range of other groups and people who find it convenient to get hold of electoral registers as a cheap means of establishing the people who live in certain areas.

I raised that matter because the present law is uncertain. Regulation 54 of the Representation of the People Regulations 1986 states:

"So long as there are sufficient copies available after allowing for the number which may be required for his registration duties . . . the registration officer shall supply to any person copies of any part or parts of the electors lists on payment—".

If that happens with electoral registers, we need to ensure that it does not happen with the poll tax registers. Until we have proper safeguards for the use of electoral registers, to protect the privacy of those who fill in their forms in good faith, we should be keen to support amendments such as the one tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland to protect people's privacy when the poll tax registers are compiled.

The simple principle is that, when people fill in their electoral registration forms, they do so with one purpose in mind—to establish their entitlement to vote. If the local authority uses the register for any other purpose whatever, that is a gross infringement of the privacy that people assume they have when they fill in their forms. It is clear that that information should not in any circumstances be sold commercially or used by private commercial companies for matters that are totally unrelated to the democratic process, which is what the electoral register is for.

We know about the flaws in the electoral register system and we know about the ambiguity of the law. So far, the Home Secretary has taken no action in that respect. It is unacceptable for the House to propose further uncontrolled registers—in this case the poll tax register—before we have dealt with the more immediate problem of the electoral register. At the very least, we would support the amendment proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland.

Mr. Dalyell: I thank the Minister for his courtesy in answering my previous question. In relation to the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) and my worries, I can only say that the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. We shall not be able to tell who is right until we have experience of the operation of the scheme.

I ask the Minister to answer another question, which concerns the personal identity card mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). There is real worry in the universities about the implications of a student identity card. In a sense, once again, the Scots are the guinea pigs. It has become a real issue in the university of Edinburgh. I do not normally refer to personal circumstances, but I have two children, both of whom are at that university at the moment. The students are extremely concerned about the implications of a personal identity card. Incidentally, I do not see how one can operate a poll tax at all without a personal identity

card because, by their nature, students are for ever changing lodgings. How one can keep track of students' situations without a personal identity card, I know not.

My question is very precise and it is simple to ask, though possibly not so simple to answer. What is the Government's philosophy in respect of personal identity cards in any university, but particularly in the big urban universities?

Mr. Simon Hughes: I rise briefly to speak to the amendments in my name and those of my hon. Friends, which in the group selected by Mr. Speaker are amendments Nos. 2, 3, 210, 211 and 212. This is an important debate because one of the express concerns, which is an unusual one in connection with local government finance, is that of civil liberties. That is what this series of amendments seeks to cover.

Amendment No. 210 seeks to apply the same test in England and Wales as that which already exists in the Scottish legislation. A similar amendment has been tabled by the Labour party. It is important to make sure that the powers of registration officers to seek information are only those reasonably required. That test, as people know, has been well tried in the courts.

Clause 6, if left unamended, would be nothing less than a snooper's charter. The Secretary of State, when the matter was put to him in a radio interview, accepted that as an appropriate description for the sort of activity that would be carried out by people chasing up information. The clause would allow registration officers

"to take reasonable steps to obtain information."

That phrase is much wider than that which the Scottish legislation uses and which we as a society have accepted is appropriate to govern the activities of officials. Registration officers could subjectively justify their activities.

As someone who worked as a lawyer before I entered this House, I know, as do most right hon. and hon. Members, the difference between a subjective and an objective test. Some crimes one may commit irrespective of one's intentions and one's own views. One may commit other crimes whether or not one has any understanding of what the crime is. That is the crucial difference. I should like to hear the Minister explain why we must accept this version of the Scottish wording and not correct what is an anomaly.

Mr. Douglas: The hon. Gentleman should not go away with the idea that section 17 of the Scottish Act offers any great safeguard. I hope he is not trying to indicate to this House that the provisions of the Scottish Act protect civil liberties. We know only too well, as has been said by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), that for the poll tax legislation to work, every official who falls within its provisions will need personal identification.

Mr. Hughes: The next point I want to make is that the Bill has become law in Scotland and that people there are now having to face the reality of it. We are seeing what happens in Strathclyde, with the way in which people have been going around with protection in order to collect information. The law as it applies to Scotland is not acceptable. All the implications of a local authority poll tax are that there will be intrusion into people's privacy all the time. The intrusion to which we already object in respect of Scotland is grossly worse in the proposal for England and Wales, without any further justification: I cannot think of any.

People need to be alert to the fact that we have in this legislation a limitless list of opportunities for people to look for information. They may refer to the housing department, season ticket records, library records, bus pass applications, and records of home improvement grants. When CIPFA reported in the context of the Scottish Bill a couple of years ago, it produced a list of 12 categories. They were the rent rolls of housing bodies; housing waiting lists; housing benefit records; registers of births, marriages and deaths; education authority records, including grants; planning and building control records; health authority records, except medical records which are protected——

Mr. Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam) *rose*——

6.15 pm

Mr. Hughes: No, I will not give way because the list needs to be read in its entirety. It is a great long list of records, all of which will be available to snoopers who want information about people who have registered their names for poll tax. Those who hold those records will then be able to sell them.

The remaining categories are the records of national utilities, such as electricity and telephone companies; local authority payroll records; insurance claims; estate agents and private data sources. That is the list.

What happens if, as occurred in Strathclyde, the person canvassed is not totally willing to give information of a type that the person feels he should not have to give? The Government's original proposal in the Green Paper was:

"Local authorities will be able to develop new techniques to meet the new circumstances that they will face."

That will hardly encourage those who are concerned about civil liberties.

Then there is the information that comes in the form of tittle-tattle from neighbours and unsigned notes delivered to the rates office. There will also be general surveillance of the kind undertaken by the DHSS, particularly if cohabitees are now to be treated as husbands and wives: who comes in through the back door after dark?

Mr. Patnick *rose*——

Mr. Hughes: I will give way in a moment.

All that intrusion into civil liberties will of course cost a fortune. The administrative costs will be enormous. It will also mean that there will be available commercially a register compiled with the utmost "Nineteen Eighty-Four" mentality—the brave new world—and sold off so that almost everybody and the whole commercial world will be able to share that information.

I now give way, because I shall be interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's defence.

Mr. Patnick: I cannot understand the hon. Gentleman's logic. Much of the information is already available and, as has been discussed before in another place, is transmitted between various authorities. It is already being shoved around the country. Even under the right-to-buy provisions, one can claim benefit from another authority; other authorities are able to obtain such information. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the commerical sale of such information is wrong?

Mr. Hughes: I object to its commercial sale, but I object also to a society in which all the information provided on every form one completes ends up a single place, in one computer, where there is a great master record. I know that the Government are determined to take over everything, but we now face significant implications in respect of the mass collection of information.

We as a country have always resisted the notion that the Inland Revenue should be able to pass information to the DHSS just at the request of the DHSS. We have always objected to there being one computer network controlled by the state. Our country is meant to defend the liberty of the individual and not the rights of the state. That is why it is vital that we do not allow individual items of information to be collected by people—in a very undesirable job—going around and locking one up if, being unsure of one's rights, one does not give that information.

I ask the Minister specifically to consider also amendment No. 213. If enacted it would provide that

"the regulations may include provision that a person shown in a charging authority's register may have access to any supporting files or documentary evidence".

In order to compile the register, the registration officer may draw on anecdotal evidence, including letters. People will have the right to examine the register but, just as in other areas, they may want to go further than that and wish to know why it is that their name is on the register. Unless one sees the supporting documentation, one needs access to the files and not just to the register itself.

Even if the Minister does not at this stage accept our proposal that the sale of registers should be forbidden, I hope he will at least accept the concern felt by somebody who happens to represent the NCCL as its constituency Member of Parliament but who also believes in the rights of ordinary people, who know nothing about the law but who believe at the end of the day that the minimum information about them, and not the maximum, should be given to either central or local government.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I wish to speak to this important group of amendments because they protect the rights of individuals in society, including their right to privacy, which many of us see as vital.

The lead amendment in the group is very simple but very important. It expresses our belief that the community charge registration officer should have only the information that is reasonably required for the purposes of collecting the poll tax. It has a good deal to commend it, and we feel that the Government should be prepared to move in that direction.

The Government have repeatedly claimed that this is not a tax to vote, and therefore disclaim the name "poll tax". But, as I said many times in Committee, the position is even worse. It is not merely a tax to vote, but a tax on putting one's name down on the register to vote, for it is not even necessary for a person to use his vote. As has been made clear throughout our proceedings, the registration officer will have the right to check the electoral register. It stands to reason that, immediately a person places his name on the register so that he can vote in local or parliamentary elections, he will be charged the poll tax. This is a tax for claiming the right to vote, a right that we have upheld for many years. It is not so many years since it was extended to 18-year-olds. Obviously, we want to protect a right that is so important in our society.

The tax will prove both unpopular and difficult to collect. As well as creating a register for its collection, the legislation will enable that register to be sold. We must add provisions to stop that. The Government have said that they have made no decision on the matter, but we hope that they will be prepared to amend the Bill to prohibit such sales.

We are also concerned about the sources from which the registration officer can obtain information. On 9 February in Committee, the Under-Secretary of State said:

"the Secretary of State will have power to place prescribed information off limits to registration officers. We have made it clear that the power will be used to ensure that registration officers do not have access, for example, to social work case files and national sources of data, such as Inland Revenue records and health records. There is a danger of becoming embroiled in a debate on sensitive information when the basic information required by the registration officer will be simply the names and addresses of adults resident in his area. It will be unnecessary for him to have access to more sensitive information."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 9 February 1988; c. 484.]

If that is what the Government intend to do, and if they intend to do it by regulation, it is no good telling hon. Members that the Secretary of State will have the power to put certain sources of information "off limits". If the Government believe that those sources of information should be off limits, they should be prepared to accept some of the amendments.

Amendment No. 139 refers to police and criminal records, social work records, health authority records and Inland Revenue records. That would seem to go along with the wording used by the Under-Secretary in Committee, and the Minister has used similar words on a number of occasions. If the Government are saying that they agree with us that those sources of information should not be available to the registration officer, they should be prepared at least to accept amendment No. 139.

We believe that the legislation will result in an intrusion on privacy. The danger of it is that the Government recognise that the tax will be extremely difficult to collect, and are therefore leaving open as many doors as possible. They want to use every behind-the-scenes method. They may use snoopers, or intrusion on records here, there and everywhere. They know that if they have not the sources of the information, they will not obtain it, and will then find it extremely difficult to make the tax work.

If the Government were convinced that the legislation was fair, and a better system than that which it replaces, the people would be prepared to accept it. It is because the system is wrong that the Government have had to include these provisions. I hope that they recognise the need to safeguard the information that is required, the way in which it is required and the way in which it can then be used. That is very important if we are to protect the rights of our citizens.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Much of what we have heard from the Opposition today reflects what we heard in Standing Committee. It seems to indicate a degree of paranoia among certain Opposition Members about what is required under the legislation.

The community charge registration officer requires only to know names and addresses to compile the register. He does not need large amounts of sensitive information, as is being suggested by some Opposition Members. There is no necessity for him to acquire such information, nor, even if

he were able to acquire it, would he be able to sell it. All that he would be selling would be a list of names and addresses.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Our concern is that we should not give the power for the information to be obtained. We should limit what is obtainable to the minimum that is necessary. We could then preclude any chance of the information being available. As the Bill is now worded, it is available, and people will be able to ask for it.

Mr. Butterfill: The point has been made a number of times. The problem is where the registration officer should go. It was suggested in Committee that he should not be permitted to ask the police for the information. That strikes me as ludicrous. Opposition Members cannot have it both ways. In yesterday's debate on new clause 1, they were suggesting that there was not a problem. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) said, I recall, that 99 per cent. of the British public were law-abiding. If that is the case, we are talking merely about catching up with the odd 1 per cent. I suspect that it may be rather more than 1 per cent., and I also suspect that some Opposition Members agree with that. Nevertheless, a minority of people will have to be pursued for their names and addresses—people who would otherwise try to evade the tax. It seems to me entirely reasonable that the officer concerned should have power to obtain from other Government Departments the information that he needs, names and whereabouts of those people, in the execution of his duties. If he is entitled to do that, he has no real interest in their medical or social welfare records. All he wants to know is where they are in order to perform his statutory duty.

6.30 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the real objection is that for the first time ever—not just in our lifetime—registers will be compiled for people's right to vote which will automatically allow them then to be taxed? Even if no further information is sought, that is the fundamental objection and that practice must be wrong. People will have a disincentive to use their vote because as soon as they are registered to vote they will be liable to pay the tax.

Mr. Butterfill: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. The purpose of the register that we are discussing is not for voting but for the collection of the community charge. There is no relationship between the electoral register and this register. Of course it is true that the electoral register will be one other source of information for the community charge registration officer, in as much as it is also a source of information——

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

Mr. Butterfill: If I have not already answered the hon. Gentleman's point by then, I shall give way to him later.

All of the things we are discussing and about which the House is concerned are sources of information, of which the electoral register is only one. It is quite wrong for the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) to single it out and make a crucial connection between the two registers. Of course, some people will try to evade the charge; some may go as far as to deprive themselves of social security benefits in an effort to do so —but I doubt it. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey is making far more of this than is necessary.

Mr. Douglas: The hon. Gentleman will recall that in yesterday's debate the Secretary of State for the Environment pleaded in aid and asserted the fact that the Inland Revenue did not know where everyone lived, and defended the idea that it should not. For the first time in our history there will be an inter-relationship between registers and information being collected for the purpose of making people pay a tax, as the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said. So the tax is directly related to the right to vote and if Conservative Members do not object to that, God help our individual liberties.

Mr. Butterfill: It is not directly related; it is indirectly related, in the same way as any other personal particulars that have been registered are related to the tax. The register is merely another source of information.

Secondly, I wish to correct the hon. Gentleman. My right hon. Friend did not defend, as the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) suggested, the principle that the Inland Revenue should not have the right to know where people live. It has that right and often knows that information. The difference is that the Inland Revenue does not always know because it deals with people who live outside the districts in which they work—it deals with them in their places of work rather than where they live. Unless the Inland Revenue has a person's reference number, it is extremely difficult for it to trace an individual because he may well work miles from where he lives. That is the point that my right hon. Friend made yesterday.

Mr. Patnick: I wonder whether my hon. Friend remembers what our hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) said yesterday?

> "We would have to give the local authority power to send to the Inland Revenue a random selection of answers received from the taxpayers, stating that Mr. X has stated that he is". —[*Official Report*, 18 April 1988; Vol. 131, c. 576.]

We heard nothing yesterday from Opposition Members about that invasion of privacy, but today the game has changed.

Mr. Butterfill: I thank my hon. Friend for his valuable point and contribution to the debate.

We say that someone should have a right to obtain the information that he needs to perform his duties. He does not need any of the other extraneous information that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey suggested——

Mr. Simon Hughes: He might.

Mr. Butterfill: I cannot conceive of circumstances in which he might. Still less can I conceive of a new breed of local authority official who, for his own amusement or private profit, compiles detailed registers on private citizens in some sort of nefarious and conspiratorial way. That would not happen and the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey well knows it.

Finally, I turn to the other point to which I object——

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston) *rose*——

Mr. Butterfill: I object to the inclusion in the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Southwark

[Mr. Butterfill]

and Bermondsey of the National Council for Civil Liberties. That is in no way to denigrate that body or to decry the excellent work that it does in many areas. My objection is that the hon. Gentleman proposes to enshrine in statute a body that is not democratically accountable, or accountable to this place. It may be internally democratic, but it is not accountable to the British public. It is fundamentally wrong to enshrine in legislation any body, however admirable it may be, that is not accountable to this place through ministerial responsibility.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman has misread the amendment. The responsibility resides with the Government; it is only a duty to consult with local authorities and the NCCL. Surely that cannot be objectionable.

Mr. Butterfill: It is objectionable that we are singling out a body that is not democratically accountable. Local authorities may be so, and there may be an argument in their case, although I disagree with it. They are at least democratically accountable to their electorate. I object to singling out a body that is not thus accountable.

Mr. Terry Davis: The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) gave a hostage to fortune, and he may find his last point quoted back at him in the future when we talk about consultation with the representatives of British industry and business.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) will be shocked to know that when the issue of identity cards was raised in Standing Committee several Conservative Members had the greatest difficulty—to understate the case—in understanding the concern expressed by Labour Members about identity cards. Several of them looked forward to the day when we would have identity cards in this country and advocated the system as being one that already worked satisfactorily in some continental countries.

Mr. Butterfill: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that I for one will welcome the day when we introduce identity cards in this country.

Mr. Davis: The hon. Gentleman has identified himself; there were others. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow will share my concern about such tendencies appearing among Conservative Members. To be fair to the Government, they did not advocate identity cards. I am sure that the Minister for Local Government will deny any responsibility for them—the Government will leave it to local authorities, and they have made that clear. Local authorities will introduce a system of identity cards, if we have one, so the Minister's point was that of Pontius Pilate.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davis: The hon. Gentleman voted for the guillotine. Many of my hon. Friends want to take part in the debate; I shall not give way.

I share the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) about the sale of these registers. This information is collected for the purpose of taxation. The Secretary of State said on the radio this morning that this was a taxation measure, and objected on those grounds to the House of Lords amending it. He denied that point in Standing Committee, but at least he has accepted it now. We shall have a register that is collected, established and available for the purpose of taxation and the Government want to make it available to the public and allow it to be sold to them. The Government have made it clear that they intend to keep people's names on the register for two years after they have died, at the address at which they lived before they died. All hon. Members have had the experience, while canvassing during an election, of knocking on doors and asking for the votes of people who had died a few months before.

After the death of a partner, widows and widowers will be bombarded for two years with junk mail addressed to people who have died. Everybody should be able to understand the distress that is caused to widows and widowers on receiving that sort of mail. We have seen people upset because they have received an election address for somebody who died a few weeks before, but for two years people will be subjected to uninvited letters from every Tom, Dick and Harry in all sorts of businesses addressed to people who are deceased. That is one of the most reprehensible but also one of the most avoidable aspects of the Bill.

It should be possible for us to ensure that the register is not made available. Information collected for income tax purposes is not available to anybody—I believe not even to Ministers unless the taxpayer wishes it. Quite rightly, it is kept confidential. For the purpose of this register inquiries will be made about who is living where, for how long, and on which nights. We can all see the intrusion that that involves into people's privacy. It is time someone said that it is not necessary for the Government to authorise registration officers over the length and breadth of the country to inquire into who slept where, on what night, and for how long. That is an intolerable intrusion into personal relationships.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West says that it is not an issue and that, according to one of his hon. Friends, 99 per cent. of our people are law-abiding and that this will apply to only 1 per cent. The point is that the information would be sought and inquiries would be made not of 1 per cent. of the population but of 100 per cent. of the population. Everybody will be required to give this information.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) says that this is nothing new and that local authorities already transfer this information from one local authority to another. The hon. Gentleman gave as an example the right to buy. The hon. Gentleman does not appreciate that the only basis on which that information is transferred from one local authority to another is where the person asks for that to be done. He does it because he is seeking to obtain a right, to increase his discount on the purchase of a house, and therefore asks the local authority to transfer the information. There is a great difference between that situation, between someone claiming income support or a tax allowance—something for which a person has to provide information—and having that information obtained from one's relatives, one's family, and neighbours. It is that to which I and my hon. Friends object.

At the moment information obtained by the Inland Revenue is not made available. I would go further than some of my hon. Friends and make this register private. I

do not see why the information should be made available at all and that is why I urge all hon. Members to support amendment No. 141.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I want to make a few brief comments on this important area of legislation, and especially on amendment No. 141 which modifies the registration officer's powers. Without that amendment the Bill is a snooper's charter, and with an extreme Right-wing Government in power we can be sure that those powers will be used.

Clause 25 gives the Minister power to issue a directive to require further information from the registration officer. That directive is not subject to any affirmative resolution or to any scrutiny by the House. We must look extremely carefully at that power. In addition, we have the Scottish experience, because, in its 18th report, the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments, an all-party Committee with a Tory majority, said that the Secretary of State for Scotland was abusing his power and trampling on the rights of Parliament by granting himself powers additional to those provided by the primary legislation. The registration officer was provided with powers of sub-delegation to enable him to ask any questions that he liked without any modification by the primary legislation, although the primary legislation limited the powers that he had.

6.45 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland has decided that the registration officer can demand documents, even though the primary legislation does not give him that power and says that he can only request information. With that very recent background, the statutory instrument was pushed through the House only a few weeks ago. We should say yes to amendment No. 141 which would modify the registration officer's powers and provide some clear guidance in the legislation that the registration officer's powers are not unlimited.

Amendment No. 142 invokes a code of practice. A code of practice is not a legislative instrument. It does not require an absolute provision, as is the case with a statutory instrument or primary legislation. But at least it is some safeguard against the jackboot powers of the Minister given to him in clause 25. That clause gives the Minister power to issue a directive to the registration officer, saying that if he believes that information has not been collected he can demand further information. At least the registration officer could rely on a code of practice to offer some safeguard about his code of conduct.

The new schedule, amendment No. 153, lists many safeguards. I do not have time to go into them, but I should like to emphasise what has been said about the prevention of the sale of information from what is essentially a private register. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis), who emphasised that the register should be private. It is appalling that the register will be considered to be in the public domain. Recently the Yorkshire water authority included in its demand note advertisements by moneylenders so that hard-pressed people could immerse themselves even further in the debt-ridden society created by this wretched Tory Government. No doubt that is the sort of enterprise culture of which the Government would approve. We are opposed to private information obtained from citizens being hawked around to organisations that have nothing more to do than to sell to people and in some cases to immerse them in even greater debt.

The last point that I want to emphasise is that, although it is not covered by the amendment, clause 25 gives the Secretary of State enormous power to issue directives to the registration officer in relation to the poll tax. If the Secretary of State is not satisfied, and if he has only a belief —he does not even have to entertain any evidence about that belief—he can demand further information. Even a registration officer seeking balanced information can be made subject to the Secretary of State's demand and fiat. For that reason, we ought to build into the legislation adequate safeguards to protect the ordinary citizen from this vicious snooper's charter and the jackboot heel of this wretched Government who want to invade people's civil liberties—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) can sneer, but there will be snoopers knocking on doors and demanding information, and behind them they will have the imprimatur of the Secretary of State. We hope that the amendments will be accepted because they provide a modest safeguard against this intrusion.

Mr. Patnick: I listened closely to the speech by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) and found that he seemed to have double standards. As I said in an intervention during the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), there was very little protest when yesterday my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) suggested that three extra questions should be included on the form. They were, "Are you a higher taxpayer, a basic taxpayer, or a non-taxpayer?".

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle) *rose*——

Mr. Patnick: I assure the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) that I shall be brief and will speak for four minutes or less. When my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East suggested asking for information, there was not a word from the Opposition. Now they say different.

Mr. Howard: This is a large and important group of amendments covering many aspects of information-gathering for the purposes of the community charge, the powers of the registration officer, data protection and the rights of the individual. We debated all those issues in some detail in Committee, and I shall endeavour to respond to the points raised in the short time that is available.

As hon. Members who served on the Committee will know, I alway attempt to adopt a conciliatory tone. Therefore, I shall begin my reply to the debate on this group of amendments by adopting a conciliatory attitude towards amendments Nos. 141 and 210. Those amendmens were addressed by the hon. Members for Burnley (Mr. Pike) and for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). They seek to restrict the information officer to obtaining information that he "reasonably requires" —the phrase that is in the Bill.

We had a long discussion on that point in Committee and I explained then that the Government's intention on this point was exactly the same as that of the Opposition —that registration officers should not be permitted to ask for information, other than that which was clearly needed

[Mr. Howard]

for the purpose of maintaining the register. I said that we believed that the Bill, as presently drafted, achieved that result. Having reflected on the points made in Committee and listened to the points made today, I shall certainly look at the matter again to see whether an amendment can be made which would make even clearer the policy that we all wish to see followed.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey referred to the amendments that would require registration officers to have regard to the civil liberties implications of registration and, in particular, to the codes of practice drawn up by or in consultation with the National Council for Civil Liberties. I have no desire whatever to cast aspersions on the aims and objectives of the NCCL, but I do not accept the suggestion that the NCCL should have a formal role in determining what should or should not be permissible under the law. That is the responsibility of Parliament, Government and the courts. As I made clear in Committee, the Government take very seriously the anxieties that have been expressed about the protection of privacy. It was with those concerns in mind that I met the Data Protection Registrar in February and agreed to draw up guidance, with his participation, on compliance with the data protection principles. I suggest that guidance of that kind is the correct way forward and is preferable to the issue of the NCCL codes of guidance, as proposed in the amendments.

Amendments Nos. 211 and 149 seek to limit or restrict the supply of any part of the community charges register. I shall attempt to deal with this question quickly, as it was also discussed at considerable length in Committee. Paragraph 18 of schedule 2 empowers my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to make regulations requiring the sale of an extract from the community charge register and a list of dwellings designated for the purposes of the collective community charge. We have made it clear that we have not taken a final decision on the sale of the extract and list, or, indeed, on the question of allowing people to opt out before the extract is sold. We have received a number of representations on this issue, all of which we shall consider carefully before a decision is reached. There is nothing more that I can usefully say at this stage, although I would remind the House that the extract will consist only of a list of addresses and names and that it will in any case be available for public inspection.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Howard: I shall not give way, as I do not have time.

The hon. Members for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) and for Burnley spoke to amendments which seek to prevent the registration officer from cross-checking his register against the electoral register. There is a simple and obvious response to that suggestion, which I have given on many occasions. I am surprised that it has not yet been grasped by Opposition Members. The electoral register is a public document. It is available to the public and it would be absurd to suggest that it should not be available to the community charge registration officer.

Amendments Nos. 152 and 153 seek to impose a schedule of restrictions on registration officers, most of them derived from the Data Protection Act. A similar amendment was discussed in Committee. I said then that I saw no point in repeating the provisions of one piece of legislation in another. Registration officers will, of course, observe the provisions of the Data Protection Act—both the data protection principles enshrined in the Act and the exemptions which it provides. There is no need whatever to restate or amend the Data Protection Act for the purposes of this Bill. We also noted the points made by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey in respect of amendment No. 213, which seeks to give registered individuals the right to inspect any information held by registration officers on backing files. That amendment is not necessary, as people who are registered already have a right to inspect the whole of their register entry under paragraph 17(1) of schedule 2. Under the Data Protection Act, individuals have additional rights to see any personal data held by a data user. That right of inspection under the Data Protection Act will extend to community charge backing files.

Amendments Nos. 139, 167 and 167A are concerned with sensitive information, to which registration officers should be denied access. Amendment No. 139 seeks to specify on the face of the statute that police, social work, health authority, Inland Revenue and employment records are "off limits"to registration officers. That proposal is similar to one in the new schedule proposed in amendment No. 153.

We accept that there are certain records to which registration officers should not have access only, and we have made provision accordingly, both by stipulating that registration officers should have access to local sources of data and by providing that even some locally held records should be withheld from registration officers. In the light of these provisions, I do not believe that anything would be gained by accepting the amendments before us.

Let me consider in turn the sources of data set out in amendment No. 139. It refers to health authority and Inland Revenue records. I can assure the House that there is no need to place those records "off limits", as the Bill does not authorise registration officers to obtain information from those sources. So far as those records are concerned, therefore, the amendment is unnecessary. It also refers to police and social work records, yet we have already made clear that we intend to use the power conferred under paragraph 9(d) of schedule 2 to prevent registration officers having access to any police records and to the most sensitive social service records.

In other words, the only real effect of amendment No. 139 would be to deny registration officers access to non-sensitive social service records and employment records. I can see nothing objectionable in allowing registration officers access to information of that kind, and I therefore urge hon. Members to reject the amendment. I remind the House that the only information that registration officers will require is a list of names and addresses. They will not need, and will not therefore be authorised to ask for, any other information which is not relevant to their functions. As all adults will in any case by under a duty to supply their names and addresses to the registration officer, I can see no objection whatever to names and addresses being checked against non-sensitive local authority records.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) raised a point regarding student identity cards. The provisions that we are introducing into the Bill relate to certificates for the status of students which will enable them to obtain the advantage of the special arrangements for students

pursuant to the provisions of the legislation. I do not believe that it can be properly characterised as a student identity card any more than the card which entitles students to concessionary rail travel, or the National Union of Students card which students customarily carry with them. Indeed, the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals has said that it is content with our proposals.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) sought to make a number of rather surprising points in view of the fact that he served on the Standing Committee and must have known that both the points to which I am about to refer were nonsense. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the registration officer will not want to know whether someone spends a night away from home. All that he will need to know is the address of someone's sole or main residence and when that residence changes.

The hon. Gentleman also made an entirely misconceived point about the names of people who have been dead for two years. The register will contain names and addresses for up to two years after people die, but, as we made clear——

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend said precisely that.

Mr. Howard: No, he did not say that. The hon. Gentleman intervenes from a sedentary position, but, if he will wait for a moment, he will see how misconceived was the point made by his hon. Friend the Member for Hodge Hill. We made it clear in Committee that the public extract from the register would show only people currently subject to the charge. It is the public extract that may be sold, so that point was nonsense.

I accept that there are legitimate concerns about the implications of the community charge for data protection. Our aim, both here and in Committee, has been to allay those concerns, not to dismiss them. It has always been our policy that the new system should be fully consistent with the provisions of the Data Protection Act, but it is astounding that we should have to listen to complaints from the Opposition about the civil liberties implications of the community charge, when a far greater threat to privacy would be posed by a local income tax, which is now part of the policy proposed by the official Opposition and the whole policy put forward by the Social and Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Cryer *rose*——

Mr. Howard: No, I shall not give way.

Let me compare the exchanges of data needed for community charge purposes with those needed for the purposes of a local income tax. For the community charge, the registration officer needs to know the name and address of every person subject to the charge. For a local income tax, the local authority would need to know not only the name and address of each person liable to pay, but comprehensive details of every person's income. I ask the House to consider what represents——

It being Seven o'clock, Mr. Deputy Speaker, *proceeded, pursuant to the Orders [22 February and 13 April] and the Resolution yesterday, to put forthwith the Question already proposed from Chair.*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 220, Noes 331.

Division No. 263] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Lambie, David
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri

Morley, Elliott
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Frank Cook.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham

Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Deputy Speaker *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions on Amendments, moved by a member of the Government, of which notice had been given, to that part of the Bill to be concluded at seven o'clock.*

Clause 8

REGISTERS: MISCELLANEOUS

Amendments made: No. 189, in page 6, line 20, leave out 'expires' and insert 'ends'.

No. 190, in page 6, line 26, leave out 'expires' and insert 'ends'.

No. 191, in page 6, line 32, leave out 'expires' and insert 'ends'.

No. 192, in page 6, line 38, leave out 'expires' and insert 'end'.—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Clause 13

RELIEF FOR STUDENTS

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): I beg to move amendment No. 214, in page 9, line 19, after 'undertaking', insert

'a full-time course in nursing education or'.

Mr. Speaker: With this we shall take the following amendments: No. 144, in page 9, line 20, at end insert 'or training'.

No. 238, in page 9, line 20, at end insert 'or nursing education.'.

No. 252, in page 9, line 41, at end insert—

'(7A) The Secretary of State shall make regulations to impose on students' grant awarding bodies a duty to reimburse students as regards payments they are liable to make to authorities in respect of personal community charges.'.

No. 253, in page 9, line 43, after 'of', insert 'nursing education or'.

New Clause 13

STUDENTS

'(1) For the purposes of this Part a person shall be treated as undertaking a full-time course of education on a particular day if (and only if) he fulfills such conditions as may be prescribed by regulations made by the Secretary of State.

(2) The regulations may include provision that—

(a) as regards any educational establishment of a prescribed description an individual (to be called a certification officer) may be designated by a prescribed person, or otherwise identified, in accordance with prescribed rules,

(b) a certification officer shall at a prescribed time supply to a person who is pursuing or is about to pursue a course at the establishment, and who is of a prescribed description, a certificate in a prescribed form and containing prescribed particulars,

(c) conditions prescribed under subsection (1) above shall include a condition as to the possession of such a certificate, and

(d) failure to supply a certificate to a person in accordance with the regulations is actionable by the person concerned as a breach of statutory duty.'.

Amendment (a) to new clause 13, in line 16, at end insert:

'(3) The Regulations shall provide that persons shall be treated as undertaking a full time course of education if they are:

(a) participating in a Manpower Services Scheme.

(b) undergoing an apprenticeship.

(c) undergoing a course of training leading to qualification as a nurse.'.

Government amendments 59, 60, 21, 57 and 58.

No. 254, in page 16, line 34, after 'of', insert 'nursing education or'.

No. 145, in page 16, line 34, after 'education', insert 'or training'.

No. 146, in page 16, line 36, at end insert

'and training shall be taken to include—

(a) participation in a Manpower Services Scheme.

Mr. Taylor: I shall speak to amendment No. 214, tabled in my name and those of my hon. Friends, and also briefly to the other standing in the names of my hon. Friends.

I hope that the amendment, and the series of amendments, appeal to hon. Members across the House. The amendment has been put forward by the Royal College of Nursing. I am proud to represent the college. I know that hon. Members on all sides would like to speak in favour of the amendment.

The reason for that is the impact on student nurses will be severe. Student nurses are in special need of our help, and of our attention. Looking at the impact of the proposed community charge on first-year nursing students, some of its highest levels will affect those studying in London. In inner London the average annual charge will be £577 a year, or more than £11 a week—about 15 per cent. of their income.

[Mr. Taylor]

In Camden, the charge will rise to as high as £782, or more than £15 a week—about 20 per cent. of a student's income. For those hon. Members who listened yesterday to the Minister extolling the virtues of his system and indeed the special rebates, I must tell them that the only student nurses who will be eligible for any of that help are in Camden. They benefit from the generosity of this Minister by no more than an extra 16p. It is difficult to see how student nurses with this low level of income and support, yet facing a higher charge, will be able to find the money they need. The effect of such a high charge on student nurses is likely to make far worse the difficulty already present in many areas. It will inevitably tend to force student nurses, looking to go into the profession, to work in areas outside London where there are lower levels of community charge. Of course there is a severe shortage of the kind of applicants for student nursing in the London area that we want.

Moreover, there will be differences even within health authorities, let alone between district authorities. Taking an extreme example, a nursing student living in the Camden end of Bloomsbury district health authority will be liable for a community charge of £782, whereas her colleague living in the Westminster end of the same health authority will be liable to pay £398. Students are not always free to choose where they live, nor to move around easily as levels change. At the very least, resentment is bound to be caused among students affected by the different levels.

There is no direct comparison between student nurses and ordinary students who will receive special help. The ordinary student grant is lower than nurses' pay. I make no pretence about that. It is not very much lower, but it is lower. Therefore, there might be an argument that students deserve help while student nurses do not. But there are compelling arguments why student nurses should be treated in essentially the same way.

Although a student nurse receives a higher salary than the student grant, after deductions for tax, national insurance and superannuation they end up little better off in cash terms. In addition, they lose out in a number of other respects when compared with students. They do not enjoy the benefits to which students are entitled, such as free banking services and the long summer vacation. We all know that many students use their summer vacation to make up their incomes in order to support themselves during the term when they are on the lowest level of support. In other words, the student is not expected to survive on the grant; they are expected to make it up. That point has been made by Conservative Members on many occasions. The student nurse is not in a position to do that.

Moreover, if Project 2000 is adopted, as I hope that it will be—the Government are considering that—nursing education will gradually be integrated into our higher and further education system. Student nurses would be paid a bursary. It would be lower than their present salary but still higher than a student grant—to reflect the manpower contribution of student nurses, not as some kind of generous give-away gesture—and they would be treated in many respects like an ordinary student. In passing, I would add that I hope that the Minister will tackle the question of what will happen to student nurses if the proposals under Project 2000 are adopted.

Mr. Butterfill: Does the hon. Gentleman consider that any other person who is studying while he is working, whether for a trade or a profession, as happens in many trades and professions, should also be granted the exemption that he wants, or does he reserve it exclusively for nurses?

Mr. Taylor: There are arguments for including all sorts of people, but special considerations apply to other groups. One is that many people on Manpower Service Commission training courses will be eligible for rebates. Another is that apprentices, for example, may be on higher incomes. Our amendment is directed to those on fixed nationally set incomes, where all are suffering the same kind of problems.

In addition—I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has given me a chance to deal with this—the nursing profession has specific recruitment problems that we must recognise. Between 1984 and 1985 there was a 7 per cent. fall in the number of applications. Last year, the student intake showed a 10·33 per cent. fall. For the first time in their history many nursing schools are experiencing difficulties in filling their intakes. In London, where the poll tax will have the most dramatic impact, there was a 33 per cent. fall in entrants between 1980 and 1986. National statistics show a 25 per cent. fall between 1980 and 1986 and there is a predicted shortfall of 3,000 recruits every year by 1990. Therefore, this legislation will have a major impact on our ability to fill the number of nursing places that Britain so desperately needs to fill, and will need to fill even more in the years to come.

Mr. Leigh: If there is a problem in recruiting nurses in London—as there is—surely that can be better dealt with by differential pay levels in London. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is absurd to argue that just because student nurses suffer from the high spending of Camden council, to which he has repeatedly referred, whole swathes of the population of Camden should be exempted from paying towards the cost of Camden services? That is an illogical and absurd argument.

Mr. Taylor: I do not know how many nurses the hon. Gentleman imagines there are in Camden. I rather doubt whether he will find that there are whole swathes of them by any stretch of the imagination. However, there are already differential levels of pay and London weighting for nurses. That clearly is not adequate at present. It makes better sense to treat student nurses in the same way as ordinary students, as I have argued throughout, rather than to throw money at the problem. We are not asking for money but for a recognition of the specific situation in which student nurses find themselves.

I do not have much time because I want to allow other hon. Members to debate this group of amendments. I hope that some Conservative Members will speak because I know that there is support for them on the Conservative Benches. Therefore, I want to deal briefly with two other amendments in the group.

There is a series of Government amendments which are designed to introduce what can only be called student identity cards. The Government have tried to call them certificates, but it is rather like the Government trying to call the poll tax the community charge—it does not really weather. I have no doubt that hon. Members on both sides of the House will find it easier to refer to them as identity cards, which is what they are.

Identity cards give rise to specific worries that all hon. Members should share. The first is that they are clearly an infringement of students' civil liberties, a subject which we debated earlier. However, here we do not have a proposal from the Opposition that the poll tax will lead to identity cards, but a Government amendment introducing identity cards for a specific group. If students are to receive identity cards in this way, that must surely open the door to others receiving them. There is no difference in logic between the need for students to have them and any other group.

I cannot see why it is necessary for students to have identity cards. I can see that the college might have to hand over names and addresses to the local authority if the scheme is to work effectively, but why does that necessitate issuing cards? Presumably colleges already have the names and addresses of all their students in one form or another. Why cannot they hand those over as they are?

Let me finally deal, still more briefly, with the student 20 per cent. contribution. We must hammer out this issue once and for all. The Government have accepted that people on income support should receive an increase in that support to cover the 20 per cent. that they will have to find from the money that is presently available to them. Yet the same situation does not seem to apply to students who have to survive on a grant.

We have in the past tabled amendments to cater for that situation and we have also pursued with the Minister the question whether there will be an increase. If the Minister is prepared to say that there will be, the amendments become much less relevant. In Committee the Minister said that the issue would have to be decided by the Jackson review, and left it at that. There are two essential problems with that. First, students will have to apply for college places not knowing whether they will have to find that 20 per cent. from their grant because they will have to apply for courses while that review is being completed. Therefore, they cannot judge whether they will have to choose their college on the basis of the charge relevant to a particular authority. Should a student decide not to choose London on the grounds that he cannot afford it, or should he assume that the Minister will be generous enough to make up the money?

Secondly, the Minister was perfectly able to say that income support would be uprated. If he could say that, despite the fact that it comes under the Department of Health and Social Security, why is his excuse for not telling us what will happen to students based on the fact that the matter comes under the DHSS? I fail to see the difference between the two.

I hope that the House will support the amendments. In particular, I return to the case of the student nurses. They are a special group and I have explained to the House why they should be treated in the same way as other students. Large numbers of nurses will be looking to the House to show that we value their role.

Mr. Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): I am honoured to follow the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor), with whom I very much agree. Let me make an appeal to my hon. and learned Friend the Minister. As he will know, I support the Bill. I courageously supported the Government last night. I also have to declare a former interest in that my eldest daughter was a National Health Service nurse and student nurse.

I am very much aware of the problems that student nurses face and, as a result, I was involved in the establishment of the pay review body. I recognise that the Government accept the particular circumstances and problems of students, and for that I am grateful, but how can my hon. and learned Friend seriously argue that there is a difference between a university student studying whatever subject he or she may be studying and a student nurse? The argument will come that the university student is given a grant that is considerably lower than the salary given to a student nurse. This will ignore the fact that the student nurse is involved in work of great responsibility —my daughter, at the age of 20, was assisting in intensive care cases—and the salary is not very large.

How can my hon. and learned Friend expect me, a supporter of the Bill, to go to my constituents in Cambridge and say that my university students will have the maximum rebate but my student nurses will not? I have to say that I am not going to do it, and I hope that my hon. and learned Friend will respond to my appeal, as a supporter of the Bill and of the principle, and make some concessions on this point. I am sure that when he reflects on the matter he will do so.

7.30 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I want to intervene briefly on behalf of the official Opposition in what is by its nature a very short debate, so that I imagine that contributions will be brief.

We shall support amendment No. 214, but I want to draw the attention of the House very briefly to amendment (a) to new clause 13. That encompasses also student nurses, but it goes wider. I know that privately there is a good deal of support for a wider exemption as typified in amendment (a), but publicly, in terms of voting, I understand that there will probably be more people in the Lobby for amendment No. 214 than there would be for amendment (a). Therefore, when the time comes, I shall advise my hon. Friends to support amendment No. 214.

Unless one or other of those amendments is accepted, or unless the Government can make a concession, we shall be left with the position, when this legislation reaches the statute book, that the apprentice in the bedsit will pay exactly the same poll tax as the managing director in the penthouse. That will be seen as patently unfair.

A student undertaking a full-time course of education but who may be employed by, say, a Government Department and sponsored on a postgraduate course, on a salary, will get an 80 per cent. discount on the poll tax, but the student nurse will get no rebate whatsoever. Where is the justification? As we said in Committee, not all students are poor, although the vast majority are. They struggle and survive on the grant. But the way the Bill is drafted, a student who follows a full-time course but is sponsored by an industrial company or a Government Department, on a salary, will get an automatic discount of 80 per cent., while student nurses will get not a penny piece of poll tax rebate, except for those few who happen to live in the London borough of Camden. And when the nurses' pay review body reports it may well be that student nurses, even with their responsibilities, will be taken out of that.

The hon. Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James) is quite right: student nurses are paid a salary, but they are carrying out a responsible job and, with the hours that they do, they are not in quite the same position. But students on a grant, with the supplementary benefit in the long recess and other jobs, can often make the same net

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

income in a year as a student nurse, because she is subject to tax and National Insurance contributions. Therefore, it is grossly unfair that student nurses are not covered.

Apprentices working on schemes ought also to be covered.

We all know the position since the Committee stage. We were not able to discuss the question of students having identity cards, because that was not on offer, but now we see Government amendment No. 59. Whereas the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals has said that it can operate new clause 13, it is wholly opposed to amendment No. 59. I shall quote very briefly from the letter sent to me, and I presume to other hon. Members, by the chairman of the committee, Professor Sir Mark Richmond. He said:

"Universities do not supply students' names and addresses to third parties without their consent. To do so would be an invasion of students' privacy, and could place some of them, for example, certain groups of overseas students, at personal risk".

He goes on to say:

"We believe that supplying names and addresses would also contravene students' rights under the Data Protection Act since the records are frequently held on computer."

There is no justification whatsoever for new clause 13. We have to press the Government on this in respect of these students. Does this presage poll tax identity cards for all poll tax payers? Going back to the debate that we have just had, the Government constantly say that there is no threat to civil liberties or to privacy, but at the end of the day there will be over 50 sets of regulations to come before the House after the Bill receives Royal Assent, some of which will give local authority treasurers the power to seek further and other information. The Government will then say that it has nothing to do with them, that the local authorities are to blame.

That is simply not good enough. We need an answer to that tonight. What is going to flow from the requirement, for students to have identity cards?

We naturally expect the Minister to say something about the student grant. We expect him to say, not that it is fobbed off to some other committee, but that the grant will at least take account of the 20 per cent. of the poll tax that students are required to pay.

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): I know that no sensible person wants to penalise student nurses as an unexpected by-product of a change in local government finance. As a group, student nurses make a major contribution to society and they are certainly not overpaid. As the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) pointed out, student nurses in London are going to be particularly hard-hit, and I hope that many of them will come and work in the hospitals in my constituency.

I part company with the hon. Member, however, on his amendment relating to student identity cards. I dislike almost all aspects of this Bill and the only thing that encourages me about it is that it is going to make the introduction of identity cards—not just for students but for the whole population—a necessity. I do not see any other way in which this system of local government finance can be operated, and as a long-term supporter of national identity cards I welcome this aspect of it. If it comes first with students, they can realise that it will apply to the rest of the country very soon indeed.

This amendment underlines the enormous problems that arise when we switch the whole basis of local government finance from buildings to people and then try to exempt particular groups. Certainly student nurses ought to be exempted, but why not student policemen—police cadets—and trainee firemen as well? One can think of a vast range of people. Some other students and non-students whose case we cannot possibly discuss in the very limited time available this evening ought to be exempted.

Mr. Leigh: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Philip Goodhart: No, because I said that I would speak for less than five minutes.

If the Bill reaches another place, it will have more than 90 minutes—indeed, nine days—in which to discuss these issues. I am sure that another place, particularly after last night's vote, will have the moral authority and the moral necessity thoroughly to investigate all the exemption issues. I expect that the Government will secure the defeat of this amendment, but I hope that it will be passed by another place and that we shall have a further opportunity to discuss it at length.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Unless important amendments are made to this part of the Bill, there will be a dangerous breakdown of communications between the Government and a particularly important generation. There are over 20,000 students in my city of Newcastle upon Tyne, and 3,500 of them may or may not be covered by student exemptions. We do not yet know the precise definition of a student. The draft Scottish regulations that are to be discussed tomorrow do not fully cover many of the uncertainties about the definition of a student. That will put university, polytechnic and college of further education administrations in great difficulties.

We are also creating very important divisions between one category of young person and another. Student nurses work alongside medical students and postgraduate science students, many of whom earn additional money by demonstrations and part-time lecturing. Student nurses will deeply resent student exemptions, and it will create a further disincentive to their recruitment. It is a mistake to assume that that disincentive will be confined to student nurses in London. The greatest fall in student nurse intake in any area prior to the introduction of this system, which will act as a further disincentive to student nurse recruitment, is to be found in the north. I expect that the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) would agree to extend what he said to student midwives and student health visitors who will encounter exactly the same kind of difficulties.

I hope that the Government will seriously consider the points that have been raised and that they will relieve university and college administrations of having to tread an extremely onerous, difficult and trouble-strewn path by not implementing new clause 13 and by not introducing exemptions for one section of a key age group while forcing other sections of that key age group to depend on a rebate system that already has its curiosities. If we are to believe the letters, leaks or whatever we may call them about the future of the rebate system, there will be even greater curiosities.

Whatever the outcome of the vote, I hope that the Government will further consider these matters; otherwise

we shall end up with a deeply divided generation and a crisis of confidence between the Government and the student community. Administration and certification uncertainties will be added to the uncertainties about the future of student grants and loans. Furthermore, the survey that was announced this morning carries an implicit threat to the future integrity of student unions.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Every time we have a debate of this kind I think to myself, "Here we go again: more exemptions, more requests for rebates." The fact is that 9 million people are already receiving some form of relief. Before we know where we are, 20 million people will be receiving help—precisely the number who are not paying rates now or who are getting help to pay them. I make no apologies for saying that I would prefer there to be no exemptions and no rebates—*[Interruption.]* I thought that would excite Opposition Members. I am not in the least bit anti-nurse, anti-student or anti-anybody else who needs help. It is the method of help that concerns me. I am very much pro-nurse and pro-student. The hearts of those who are trying to do something for them are in the right place but their method is wrong. Nurses are paid; students are given grants; the elderly receive help. That is the way to deal with those who will have difficulties over the community charge. Amendment after amendment advocating exemptions is nonsense.

7·45 pm

I want to deal with what is going wrong as we discuss the amendments. These amendments, and all the amendments that we have discussed so far, also affect the principle and the future of local government. The threatened principle, where there are exemptions and rebates, is the link between services and costs. The Bill sets out to link users and payers—hence the name "community charge". I make no apologies for saying that we should charge for services. The term "community charge" gives the lie to the fact that this is a poll tax, because a poll tax is a charge for voting.

I am well aware of the fact that the notion of charging everybody upsets some hon. Members. I have sat through 147 hours of hon. Members being upset about it. During those 147 hours I heard no hon. Member suggest that nurses should be given free postage stamps, and I have heard no call for cheaper water, electricity or coal for students, yet they are just as essential as dustbins, street lights and fire brigades. All exemptions and rebates cut right across the principle of trying to create a link between services and costs. That link is important, because it puts local government firmly in the real world. That is where the Opposition do not want local government to be. Local government has to face the inescapable, economic fact of life that services cost money. Exemptions disguise that fact. Public services affect the pockets of us all. If we look at the track record of local government, we see that it is usually the poorest who are affected most.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): If the hon. Gentleman is against exemptions, could he explain why he is for rate capping? If he is referring to a direct relationship between services and accountability, that clearly works in the other direction.

Mr. Wilshire: That has absolutely nothing to do with it. I was referring to the link between services and costs and to what people contribute. The rate-capping mechanism is concerned with local government misbehaving itself.

Another point that concerns me greatly is that exemptions and rebates will have a detrimental effect on local government. I sat through the whole of yesterday's debate and I have sat through the whole of this one, but I have not yet heard any hon. Member discuss the effect that these amendments will have on local government. The discussion has centred on the effect that they will have on individual people. If, however, there is to be sensible local government, we must consider the effect on both individuals and local government.

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument with some difficulty. Is he saying that he is against exemptions, but favours the solution of increasing student grants, pensions and so on? The burden of the community charge, which we know will be there, will be compensated for in some other way.

Mr. Wilshire: That is the way I would go. I would not be specific in a debate such as this. What I believe should happen, if we have a community charge which clearly introduces the link between services and cost, is that every local person should hand over money to the local council for services. If they cannot afford to do that, we should explore, as the hon. Lady has just said, ways of helping those who need help in paying the charge, but not in this particular way. All the exemptions and the rebates that we might allow will further confuse the real role of local government. It will confuse the point that local government is, above all else, a provider of local services. The sooner it gets back to such thinking, the sooner it will secure its future. Exemptions and rebates will confuse that role for local government in two particular ways.

If there are exemptions and rebates such as these, we will first turn a charge on all into a tax on some and introduce the ability to pay and arguments on the redistribution of wealth into the local government arena. Those are tasks for central Government. Secondly, we will involve councillors in social engineering. They will see within their arena the whole question of the redistribution of wealth and feel obliged to find ways of doing the Government's job. It is that social engineering that has brought us to this Bill in the first place. It would be ironic indeed, if we passed amendments which had the effect of the Bill making social engineering by local councillors worse rather than better.

I urge the House to vote against the amendments, as it has voted against all the others so far. I urge the House to go on voting against them time after time when they attempt to make exemptions. I am against all attempts to introduce banded charges, to exempt more people and to improve the rebates. If we do not oppose these amendments, local government will get worse, not better. Local services will suffer, not improve.—[AN HON. MEMBER: "Hang the nurses."] When we come to the debate on capital punishment, my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) will get a nasty surprise, because he will probably find me in the other Lobby.

Above all else, if we do not watch our step, if we do not vote against all these amendments, we shall end up where we started—with another Local Government Finance Bill.

[Mr. Wilshire]

I am quite convinced that the House does not want that. I am certain that I do not want another 147 hours of nonsense from Opposition Members.

Mr. Wilson: The hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) has demonstrated a notable Tory characteristic which can be summed up in one word—selfishness. I am thinking of his attitude not so much towards the poll tax, but towards his colleagues. What distinguishes the hon. Member for Spelthorne from the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James), who showed rather more circumspection, is that the hon. Member for Spelthorne has a majority of 20,050, whereas the hon. Member for Cambridge has a majority of 5,060. That really is—[HON. MEMBERS: "Do not challenge the hon. Gentleman's integrity."] I cannot challenge what is not there.

Mr. Cormack: The hon. Gentleman does his argument a disservice. I had a majority of 25,000, which does not stop me from opposing this Bill. The hon. Gentleman should watch his words.

Mr. Wilson: I am sorry, but I am not prepared to take that from the hon. Gentleman, because my experience of the poll tax is that many who will be protected from it will find it morally repugnant. I respect those Conservative Members who are prepared to share that opinion. I respect the fact that many of the most articulate and decent opponents of the poll tax on the other side of the House have nothing to fear from it politically. However, I believe that we heard the true doctrine from the hon. Member for Spelthorne—that, if they could get away with it politically, those in favour of the poll tax would not protect the lame, the weak, the mentally handicapped, the elderly and the young unemployed. In respect of all those categories, they would wipe out the nonsense about rebates or anything else.

Mr. Butterfill: The hon. Gentleman will find that Conservative Members and, I am sure, many in the Labour party may regret his aspersion on my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James). I think it will be common ground on both sides of the House that he has never failed to vote according to his conscience on almost every issue, certainly as long as I have known him. Many other hon. Members have known him longer than I have.

Mr. Wilson: We have grown accustomed to the moderate and helpful interventions in Committee of the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) which invariably end up with him voting for the most reactionary side of the argument. I advise those hon. Members who voted with the Government last night, whose minds are yet to be concentrated, that this issue will progressively concentrate their minds. The smaller the majority, the sharper the degree of concentration. I do not think there is anything exceptional about that.

Mr. Wilshire: I do not think that I can allow my integrity to be attacked without that point being withdrawn or my being able to put on the record quite clearly that I totally support this legislation, because I believe that it is right. I spelt out in words of one syllable that I care as much as anybody in the House. I am just as determined to find ways of helping people who need help, but I do not believe that this particular Bill is the vehicle for helping people who need it. I resent very much my integrity being attacked.

Mr. Wilson: The hon. Gentleman can resent it until he is an even deeper blue in the face, but what he has just propounded is the abolition of all rebates and all concessions to all categories of society. He wants that on the record; I want that on the record. I do not know what we are disagreeing about.

We know that the wobbly Tory conscience is very cheaply bought. The announcement last Thursday about rebates is exposed for exactly what it is in this debate on student nurses. When we were debating this matter in Committee, it was drawn to the attention of the Government that, according to the pre-Thursday formula—the pre-magnanimity formula—there was not a student nurse in the country who would receive a penny rebate unless he or she lived in the London borough of Camden. There would not, for instance, be a student nurse in the whole of Scotland who would receive a penny rebate, because, in the view of the Government and the architects of this legislation, student nurses are far too well paid to deserve a rebate. The hon. Member for Spelthorne, the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West and the Minister are firmly of the view that every student nurse in the country is far too well paid to require a penny of rebate.

Let us look at the post-Ridley miracle figures on the magnanimity of the new rebate system. Before last Thursday, in an area where the poll tax was £250 a head, which is above the English average, a student nurse would receive no rebate. After Thursday a student nurse will also receive nothing in rebate. In areas such as my own, where the poll tax is £300 a head, before last Thursday a student nurse would receive not a penny in rebate. After last Thursday a student nurse will receive not a penny in rebate. If we go to the highest rated authorities outside London, before last Thursday a student nurse would receive not a penny in rebate. After last Thursday, a student nurse will receive not a penny in rebate. That is what last Thursday is worth to student nurses throughout the country. That would surely have been appreciated by Conservative Members when they heard that announcement. The only concession arises where student nurses are living in a local authority area where the per capita poll tax is £550 per head, which, at present figures, would affect at most two or three of the London boroughs. In those areas, student nurses now begin to qualify for the magnificent sum of 66p per week in rebate, when they are being asked to pay £550 per year in poll tax. They are among the 9 million people whom the newly reformed Conservative Members are now prepared to wear on their chests as symbols of what happened last Thursday. However, nobody can hide behind their conscience as much as behind statistics. The fact is that outside the handful of London boroughs—possibly the one, two or three boroughs where the statistics begin to apply—the relevance of last Thursday is that not one student nurse in the country will receive a penny in poll tax rebate because, in the Government's view, they are far too highly paid to do so.

8 pm

That is the reality that Conservative Members, including the hon. Member for Cambridge, will have to take out into the country. I admire the hon. Gentleman for

the fact that he has some reservations about doing so. However, I assure him, and every hon. Member who is still prepared to cling to the principle of the poll tax, that just as they will eventually have to take the truth about student nurses out into the country, there are a thousand similar examples of people who will be cruelly penalised under the poll tax, but who do not yet realise it, and every one of those cases will have to be explained to an increasingly sceptical and hostile electorate.

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): I cannot preface my remarks with the protestations of loyalty with which my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James) prefaced his remarks. However, I hope that the Government will listen to what we are saying in this debate, which is the seventh of eight in which we are asking the Government to think again on this issue.

I rise in support of amendments Nos. 214 and 238 which seek to extend the protection for students to student nurses. Yesterday we debated the principle of banding, and the Government pointed out what they saw as difficulties, anomalies, and problems about the cross-over points. Today's debate has made it clear that the Government have their own banding proposals. However, unlike yesterday's debate, in which banding was on the basis of income, banding in this debate is according to educational status. If one is talking about tax, it is far more logical to band according to income than to educational status because that leads us into all sorts of difficulties, anomalies and cross-over points which are far more difficult to defend than the anomalies and difficulties that we defended yesterday. A rich undergraduate, for example —and there are some—who is able to supplement his income in the vacations will receive 80 per cent. relief, whereas a poor nursing student who has no such opportunity will not receive comparable relief. That is a difficult point to explain on the doorstep.

Like other hon. Members, I have children at university and know that some of my children's contemporaries are being paid for by the police force or, in some cases, by the armed services. They receive a salary, but, for the purpose of this clause, they will count as students. How does one defend that position when their salary might be higher than that of a student nurse? It is certainly the case that the Government are sponsoring post-graduate students and that those students will be granted exemptions. There is a major inconsistency in the Government's approach towards those undertaking education and training.

I should like to comment briefly on student nurses. Like the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor), I have been in touch with the Royal College of Nursing, which is concerned about this matter. If one considers the future of nursing and nurse training, one can see that student nurses will become more and more like students and slightly less like nurses. Page 6 of the Project 2000 briefing of the Royal College of Nursing, which hon. Members have been sent, states:

"Project 2000 proposes that 20 per cent. of the students' time over the 3 years would be spent as an employee service contribution, rather than the present 80 per cent."

That is a fairly dramatic turnround in the nature of nurse training. Nurses will become far more like students. The briefing then states:

"Only two countries in the world, the UK and Eire, still have nursing students as employees."

In other words, we are going to move more towards the position that is adopted elsewhere and nurses will become more and more like students.

Against that background, and against the problems that we face in London in relation to recruiting nurses, one simply cannot afford to put extra problems in the path of student nurses.

The last sentence of the briefing from the Royal College of Nursing states:

"Numbers entering nurse training dropped from 33,370 in 1979 to 22,825 in 1987."

In view of that, is it really sensible to put an additional burden on the backs of student nurses?

I hope that when the Division comes, my hon. Friends who have hitherto been loyal, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge, will take the view that on this issue an injustice is being done to student nurses. It is an injustice that could be put right quite easily without doing any of the damage that we heard about yesterday, simply by carrying amendment No. 214. If that happened, it would enable those of us who have been campaigning for changes to the Bill to feel that we have at least removed one inequity from the Bill to the benefit of the legislation.

Mr. Dalyell: As is my wont, and because of the guillotine, I should like to ask one question and then make an observation. The question is purely factual. What work has been done in the Department on the likely effect of the poll tax on the recruitment of student nurses, first, in London, and, secondly, in the rest of the country?

My observation is that, like the hon. Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart), I was here 10 years ago when we had a controversial Bill. We had a Labour Government, and the Bill related to Scotland and Wales. Unfortunately for some people in that Government, they never got a guillotine. Therefore, it was possible for the House of Commons to do its job. I borrow a phrase from Enoch Powell who took part in those debates, in a situation not unlike this. Enoch said that that Bill had a "smell of death" about it. Were the House of Commons, on this occasion, allowed to do its job, that smell of death would emerge, because it is like lifting stones. Again, to borrow from Enoch Powell, it is a question of all sorts of creepy-crawly things creeping out from under the stones. That can only be done on the first, second, third and fourth attempts.

I am not being personally rude to the Minister because that is not my wont. However, there is another comparison. The devolution Bill was handled by what we, in the Opposition, would regard as an exceptionally able Queen's Counsel, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). There is one thing about very able QCs—one will not catch them out the first, the second or the third time; one must go on and on. It suited Jim Callaghan that I was allowed, with Enoch Powell and one or two others, 47 days on the Floor of the House——

Mr. Rooker: And with the present Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Dalyell: Certainly. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition was not as good an attender as I was and he did not ask as succinct questions as I did. Nevertheless, he came in and went out again, and did his part—[HON. MEMBERS: "A leadership bid."] I do not know whether this is a leadership bid. It is partly a reminiscence.

[Mr. Dalyell]

I think that more and more this Bill is getting found out. It has geological flaws and part of the symptoms of a geological flaw is this kind of vignette debate.

I do not want to anger my colleagues, but I think that there was a great deal in what the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) said. Once one starts exemptions, one can go on asking for other exemptions. If there should be exemptions for student nurses—as we believe—why not for trainee firemen or trainee a lot of other things? Other groups, some of which are small, will think that they have good cases. The difficulty is that the House of Commons does not have the time or the opportunity to explore those cases. I must behave myself, because I must not go on and on.

Mr. Winnick: I take my hon. Friend's point that the Bill is basically defective and that there are anomalies in having exemptions for student nurses, people over 80, and so on. Does he agree with my earlier comment that if we work on the basis that this is an obnoxious Bill, our job in opposition, bearing in mind the Government's majority, is to do what we can to ensure that there will be protection for those who will be penalised? Although there are all kinds of anomalies in the amendments, if they were carried we would be protecting some people who otherwise would be harshly hit by this Treasury measure.

Mr. Dalyell: I would not agree. It would be an interesting exercise if, by a magic carpet, the Minister could be transported to this side of the red line to put the awkward QC questions to the Government on the other side. I think that the effect would be dramatic—*[Interruption.]* He would do it just as well. That is the point about clever QCs. I am not insulting his integrity.

Mr. Winnick: They would argue anything for money.

Mr. Dalyell: No, I did not say that. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East did not do anything like that. Ministers have a job to do and they have a loyalty. As my right hon. and learned Friend had a loyalty to Jim Callaghan, so the Minister has a loyalty to the present Prime Minister. All I am saying is that that does not refute our argument that the whole proposition is flawed fundamentally.

Ms. Mowlam: I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that at the time of the peasants' revolt in 1381, when Richard II was facing the impact of a poll tax, the crowd shouted, "A plague on all lawyers."

Mr. Dalyell: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam). I really must sit down.

Mr. Butterfill: The nub of the problem is the difference between full-time students and those who are studying whilst working. It is no doubt true that an increasing number study and train at the same time as they work. That trend is likely to continue. Therefore, we should be debating how we deal with those people and whether we should treat them in the same way as students.

What has been argued from the Opposition Benches is that we should treat a particular group in a special way. That argument cannot hold water because we should not single out one group at the expense of others. There are many other groups which would fall into a similar predicament as that which would be experienced by student nurses. My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) outlined a few such cases.

It is significant that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) said that he would have preferred amendment (a) to amendment No. 214. He pointed out that amendment (a) included a large number of additional groups which he thought were equally deserving. I suggest that there are even more groups in comparable positions than are included in amendment (a). The problem is that Opposition Members want to make political capital out of this. That is why they are not pursuing amendment (a) even though they admit that it is a better amendment than amendment No. 214.

The hon. Member for Perry Barr said that amendment (a) was better but that he thought he would get more support for amendment No. 214. Why does he think that he will get more support for amendment No. 214? Because it concerns exclusively nurses. It is well known that there is greater public sympathy for nurses than for other groups who may be equally deserving. Therefore, what we have seen from the Opposition Benches is a study in cynicism. They are treating this as a pure electioneering exercise.

Mr. Rooker: The simple fact is that I added up the numbers who were prepared to vote for a Labour amendment as opposed to a Social Democratic Liberal amendment. There seemed to be more hon. Members willing to vote for amendment No. 214. The procedure under the guillotine, for which the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) voted, does not allow the Labour party to vote for amendment (a). It is a simple matter of arithmetic.

8.15 pm

Mr. Butterfill: I accept that it is a procedural point but I am sure that it has suited the arguments of the Opposition, who have concentrated almost exclusively on the predicament of nurses. If that were not so, why did Opposition Members not concentrate on the arguments for other groups in addition to nurses?

The answer to the problem of the nurses is not to give them exemption through the amendment but to deal with them through the independent review body which has been set up to decide what their pay should be. We decided to take nurses' pay out of the political arena. Yet Opposition Members insist on perpetuating it as a political issue. I believe that the public will make their own judgment as to the motives of the Opposition.

Mr. Cormack: I am not making an electioneering speech. I hope that my hon. Friend will acquit me of that.

It is a pity that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) introduced such a note into his speech. In the Chamber we should always assume the sincerity of our opponents' arguments and go for their judgment and tactics, but we should not descend to the depths which he did in his unfortunate remarks.

We are debating a peculiar anomaly of the Government's own creation. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), who has fought so valiantly on the issue, was right when he said that to treat a rich undergraduate in one way and a student nurse, who may be in straitened circumstances, in another is not only anomalous but thoroughly unjust. I hope that even at this late stage my hon. and learned Friend can do something.

No one by any stretch of the imagination could construe this as a wrecking amendment. It would be a small concession. I hope that my hon. and learned Friend can make this small, inexpensive concession for a group of people who probably command more public sympathy than any other group.

At a time when the Government are about to make the right decision, as I believe they are, on nurses' pay, I would regret it if they were to take an intransigent line on the amendment. I urge my hon. and learned Friend to reply in the conciliatory spirit of which I know him to be capable. Able lawyer that he is, I am sure that he is not a man with a heart of flint. Somewhere he has deep feelings in which I would urge him to indulge himself just for a moment.

Mr. Howard: We all enjoyed the remiscences of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), but he is wrong when he suggests that as the Bill proceeds through Parliament new weaknesses, as he would have it, are identified and exposed.

We have had an interesting debate on this important question. Despite the fact that the arguments against the Government's position have been enriched by the new, powerful and persuasive advocacy of my hon. Friends the Members for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James) and Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), who unhappily did not join us in Committee, none of the arguments which have been put forward were new. No new points were put forward. We argued the matter through in Committee. Indeed, a member of the Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), put his finger with absolute precision on the distinction at the heart of the Government's case: there is a difference between those who are in full-time education and those who are at work and obtaining their education at work.

Mr. Cormack: What is the difference between a young man of 22 with a commission in the Army and a salary at Cambridge or any other university and a student nurse at Addenbrooke's? Why should one be treated so very much more favourably than the other?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely correct in identifying an anomaly. It affects a tiny number of people and in any legislation there are anomalies which one expects. The extent to which an anomaly becomes acceptable or invalidates the principle of the legislation can be decided by the number of people affected by it. That is the answer to my hon. Friend's question.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): The Minister has finally grudgingly admitted that this is an anomaly and he implied that there may be many others. Will he agree with equal honesty that the best way to remove the anomalies is to build into the legislation a clear recognition of the ability to pay?

Mr. Howard: No, I do not agree with either of the hon. Gentleman's points. I did not imply that there were many other anomalies. We shall examine some aspects of his latter point shortly, but I certainly do not agree that his remedy would provide any improvement.

First, I shall deal with the Opposition amendments Nos. 214, 238, 253, 254, 144, 145, 146, 252 and amendment (a) to new clause 13. These are designed to extend the definition of a full-time course of education to include student nurses, apprentices and participants in MSC schemes. We debated similar amendments at length in Committee and I have heard nothing to today to convince me that the Committee was wrong to reject those amendments.

The Committee accepted the Government's case that full-time students are in a unique position, and therefore merit special treatment in the form of a reduced charge: they will pay only one fifth of the personal community charges. Student nurses differ from students in two important respects. First, their financial situation is different. A student nurse's salary, for example, is considerably higher than even the highest student grant. The student grant outside London is less than £2,000 a year, compared with a starting salary of £4,540 for a student nurse. The average earnings of student nurses outside London are between £5,000 and £6,000—two and half to three times the student grant.

I accept the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge that student nurses work extremely hard and carry out onerous responsibilities, so more than justify those salaries. Naturally, we accept and appreciate that, but that is not the point. By virtue of their hard work and the responsibilities that they discharge they receive incomes which are substantially higher than student grants.

Secondly, student nurses are salaried staff whose training is carried out in the context of their full-time employment. Many jobs involve a similar element of on-the-job training. If we gave special treatment to student nurses we could not justify withholding it from a large number of other groups, from police cadets to trainee accountants, or even pupil barristers.

I would not deny that some trainees have low incomes, for example, those participating in YTS and JTS courses. Many of those on YTS will be under 18, and therefore not subject to the personal community charge. Those who are over 18, as well as those on JTS courses, apprentices and other trainees, will be eligible for community charge rebates on the same basis as all other people whose incomes are low. The improved rebate arrangements will bring many more young people, including no doubt many trainees, within eligibility for rebates as well as increasing the rebate entitlement of many others. That answers the question of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) about an apprentice in a bedsit.

Amendment No. 252 is rather different. It would oblige the Government to reimburse full-time students for the 20 per cent. payment they will be required to make towards the community charge. I must urge the House to reject this amendment, not least because it is premature. These matters are being considered by the review which is taking place under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science. The review is considering all aspects of student support arrangements, including the impact of the community charge, and I understand that it is likely to report shortly. Until it does it would be wrong to deal separately with only one aspect of student finances.

I turn now to the first of the Government amendments, No. 21. This is a purely technical amendment to the rights of appeal under clause 22. It deletes subsection (2)(c) of clause 22 which provides a right of appeal if a registration officer does not accept that a person is a full-time student. That right will continue to be available, but it is no longer necessary to provide for it expressly, in the light of another

[Mr. Howard]

amendment which was agreed in Committee. It relates to entries in the register, which I need not go into in detail now.

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) asked about the effects on our proposals of Project 2000. It is a proposal by the United Kingdom Central Council, which deals with the training of nurses, on possible changes to future training. Following consultation, Ministers in the Department of Health and Social Security will consider what, if any, steps should be taken to implement those recommendations. This Bill is concerned with the present system and at present student nurses are clearly not full-time students in the accepted sense. If Project 2000 is implemented in due course and student nurses are treated as students on bursaries rather than salaries, we shall certainly reconsider their position under the community charge.

The hon. Member for Truro, his party and, indeed, if I understand his position correctly, my hon. Friend the Member for Acton favour a full local income tax. The House should consider the implications for student nurses and newly qualified nurses of the effects of a local income tax. A first-year student nurse in inner London would be likely to pay more in local income tax than in community charge.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Howard: I shall sit down shortly in order to give the hon. Gentleman time to speak.

A third-year student in inner London would pay considerably more than under the community charge—as much as £1,000 in Camden and £830 in Lewisham. A newly qualified nurse would be likely to pay more local income tax than community charge in every local authority in England. In Camden her bill could be as high as £1,500, in Manchester £375, and in Durham £300.

In the light of the implications of the local income tax proposals put forward by the hon. Gentleman's party, one should truly assess the strength of the propositions that he has been advancing. For that, if for no other reason, I invite the House to vote against his amendment.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: With the leave of the House, I should like briefly to respond to the debate.

This is a debate not about local income tax but about making the Government's system fairer. I hope that the Minister will accept that, although figures under his proposals for local income tax may or may not be true, under our proposals, which he was given earlier today, he was simply wrong.

The hon. Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James) spoke from family experience and with typical integrity, such as we expect from him. The hon. Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) referred to the Lords. I beg both sides of the House not to leave this to the Lords in the hope that they will make changes. A direction from the House is needed, and the House's position should be made clear.

The speeches by the hon. Members for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) and for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) were equally generous and showed the integrity of those hon. Members.

The hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) spelt out the true opposition to the amendment. It has nothing to do with local income tax. The hon. Gentleman said that he would prefer a Bill with no exemptions and no rebates. That is the true alternative. I say to hon. Members: for goodness sake recognise the value of student nurses and support them.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 232, Noes 321.

Division No. 264] **[8.30 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Patrick
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas

McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Rhodes James, Robert
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Robin
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Wallace and
Mrs. Ray Michie.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick

Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Lloyd and
Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after half-past Eight o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Orders [22 February and 13 April] and the Resolution yesterday, to put forthwith the Question on amendments moved by a member of the Government up to the end of clause 15 and new clause 13.*

New Clause 13

STUDENTS

'(1) For the purposes of this Part a person shall be treated as undertaking a full-time course of education on a particular day if (and only if) he fulfills such conditions as may be prescribed by regulations made by the Secretary of State.

(2) The regulations may include provision that—

(a) as regards any educational establishment of a prescribed description an individual (to be called a certification officer) may be designated by a prescribed person, or otherwise identified, in accordance with prescribed rules,

(b) a certification officer shall at a prescribed time supply to a person who is pursuing or is about to pursue a course at the establishment, and who is of a prescribed description, a certificate in a prescribed form and containing prescribed particulars,

(c) conditions prescribed under subsection (1) above shall include a condition as to the possession of such a certificate, and

(d) failure to supply a certificate to a person in accordance with the regulations is actionable by the person concerned as a breach of statutory duty.'.
—[Mr. Howard.]

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 16

JOINT AND SEVERAL LIABILITY: SPOUSES

Ms. Jo Richardson (Barking): I beg to move amendment No. 147, in page 11, line 8, leave out clause 16.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments:

No. 150, in page 11, line 8, leave out 'This section applies' and insert

'Regulations may provide that this section shall apply'.

No. 151, in page 11, line 16, at end insert—

'(1A) Regulations shall not be made under this Section until the Secretary of State has laid before Parliament a report on the relationship between joint and several liability for community charge and the assessment of married people for income tax purposes planned to be in effect from 1st April 1990.

(1B) Regulations shall not be made under this Section unless a draft of them has been laid before and approved by resolution of each House of Parliament.'.

No. 148, in page 11, line 45, at end insert—

'(9) For the purposes of this section the power of recovery by distress shall not be exercised against a spouse in respect of arrears accruing from any period when subsection (7) above applied where the person who incurred the initial liability is no longer residing in the matrimonial home and the spouse is residing in the matrimonial home and is entitled to a rebate under section 23 below'.

Ms. Richardson: Amendment No. 147 seeks to remove the most blatant contradiction in this Bill. Our other amendments provide safeguards that will be necessary if the proposed clause is carried.

The concept of joint and several liability in clause 16 exposes the cynical hypocrisy of the major argument put forward by the Government time and time again in support of the poll tax: that every individual must be made personally responsible and accountable both for payment of the tax and, at least in the Government's thinking, for their voting behaviour except—I repeat, except—if they happen to be married or live with someone as husband and wife. That is the plain fact of the matter.

In this instance, it is just a small matter of some millions of spouses—or millions of contradictions, really—for whom personal responsibility and accountability will be stood on its head by joint and several liability. It will enforce responsibility for each other's non-payment of tax and tax arrears, regardless of ability to pay, upon married and cohabiting men and women.

Nothing exposes the real driving force behind the Bill more clearly than that provision: one law for one, and one law for another. That is what the Government put forward. The real driving force is to continue the Government's programme of redistributing resources from the poor and near-poor to the rich and the richest. It follows the pattern of successive Budgets, culminating with this year's obscene £2 billion tax handout to top

taxpayers, as well as the pattern of successive social security so-called upratings and reviews, with this month's tragic implementation of the new social security system, which has robbed the poorest in our society of a further £1 billion.

It follows also the pattern of redistributing wealth from north to south. Last but by no means least, it follows the pattern of redistributing resources from women to men.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Lady speaks of the redistribution of wealth from the north to the south. But under the Bill as a whole there will be a substantial redistribution of money from the south to the north, which is the best regional policy this country will ever see.

8.45 pm

Ms. Richardson: The hon. Lady has not done her homework. I suggest that she reads the debate, because time and again the point has been made by my hon. Friends that what she claims is entirely untrue.

Women's earnings are still less than three quarters of men's average earnings, and I am sorry to say that the gap is widening. For many women in part-time employment, the gap is even wider. Does the House have any real concept of what that means? It means that women form the majority of those in the poverty trap; 75 per cent. of women low-income earners will be only partially exempt. Anyone receiving income support will still pay 20 per cent. of the charge, but part or all of that sum may be returned —though I stress the word "may". Low earners will also have to pay a percentage of poll tax; again, there may be limited rebates.

Last week's decision to extend limited exemption will only marginally slow down the rate at which the rebate is lost as income rises; those affected will now lose only 15p of rebate for every extra £1 earned above income support level instead of 20p. Several million women fall into those categories. Women who are unemployed, single parents, caring for children or for elderly dependants and who are pushed into unemployment or low-paid, part-time work at such levels of income, will find paying another £100 or £200 a year impossible.

One may look at the case of black and ethnic minority women. Many women who are black or Asian are in jobs in the service sector and in professional services such as nursing; we have just finished a debate on student nurses. They are all jobs that are unjustifiably undervalued and underpaid. Asian women of working age are not economically active and have no paid work outside the house. Ethnic minority communities are concentrated in the inner-city areas and served by authorities that will be hardest hit by the poll tax. For example, it is estimated that the full charge in Camden will be £782.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: That is because it is a rotten authority.

Ms. Richardson: That combination of factors means that women from the ethnic minorities will be badly hit. Approximately 5 million spouses are unwaged. The vast majority on them are women, and most married women cannot register for unemployment benefit. Joint and several liability means that, where one partner is not in paid employment, they will be dependent on their spouse or partner for payment of the poll tax. In the case of non-payment, they will be responsible also for arrears accrued by a spouse or partner who has subsequently deserted, regardless of their ability to pay and up to the point of attachment of earnings, of seizure of goods, or both.

My postbag—this certainly applies to those of my hon. Friends as well, and probably to those of Conservative Members—is overflowing with the fears, insecurity, anxiety and turmoil that the measure has brought about in individual women and organisations representing women, especially women who suffer mental or physical abuse within the family. The concern that the proposal is causing should not be underestimated by Conservative Members, or by those in the other place who are interested in the issue. Despite the existence of violence against women in every society known to us, and in every time in recorded history, this is an aspect that must be drawn to the Government's attention all along the line.

I pay tribute to the work of Women's Aid—especially the Welsh branch—on the issue of the register, and the danger posed to some women if their addresses are published, as well as its work on joint and several liability. For women living in strained relationships, abuse frequently takes the form of financial deprivation. Many women have no knowledge of how much their husbands earn, and no access to, or control over, their household income. Women in such already stressful and sometimes violent relationships will be placed under further intolerable stress and danger. They will be powerless to control their partners, and may come under pressure to withhold their names from the poll tax register and the electoral roll to avoid the tax—and the aggravation, and indeed the threats, that it will cause. If and when the relationship breaks down and he walks out without trace, leaving all the debts, she will be liable.

Mr. Butterfill: Does the hon. Lady object to the principle now existing in many cases under English law whereby a husband can be responsible for his wife's debts, or is it merely the extension of that principle to put women on an equal footing for the purposes of the Bill to which she objects?

Ms. Richardson: I am not sure what point the hon. Gentleman is making. If I talk mostly about women, it is because it is a plain fact of life that, in the majority of break-ups in this country, it is the man who leaves the family. I see case after case in my surgeries—I assure the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) who is shaking her head—in which the woman who comes to see me has been left because her husband is in some way not strong enough to bear the burdens, stresses and strains of the poverty in which they live. I beg the hon. Lady to believe that. If she examines some of her cases, she will find that it is true.

Let me return to the point that I was making about people leaving debts for which whoever is left behind in the home—usually the woman—is liable. In Committee, the Minister said that, by and large, it would be left to local authorities to decide how to recover the money. I raised the point in a meeting with my local authority last Friday. Until then, the authority had not appreciated it. My borough treasurer went pale at the thought of having to set up some form of policing mechanism to chase the departing spouse and find out where he, or even she, was, and to make him or her responsible—if that was the authority's decision.

[Ms. Richardson]

Marriage guidance counsellors are warning us that financial problems are already a major source of marital stress and breakdown. The added burden of the poll tax on low-income families, and families of all kinds in which women have to bear responsibilities for full-time child care or the full-time care of disabled relatives—now one in eight women—will greatly increase that stress.

Mr. Leigh: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Richardson: If the hon. Gentleman does not mind, I shall continue with my argument. We have very little time.

An estimated 5 million women are caring for disabled or elderly parents. Their ability to take up paid employment is severely limited, and for most of them it is out of the question. In fact, it is the second most common reason for women to take early retirement. The Scottish National Association of Carers is convinced that the extra burden of the poll tax will tip the balance on whether families are able to cope with the financial burden of their own tax as well as that of their elderly parents. The association says:

"There are already enough tensions in households caring for an old person who may be incontinent or senile. The Poll Tax is the straw which will break the camel's back."

Under the Government's proposals, a woman who is married or cohabiting, and who has given up her job or taken early retirement to care for her mother, or his mother, or her father, may find herself responsible not only for her own tax but for her spouse's, if he leaves, and for her dependant's tax. She will not be able to cope with that, other than by trying to put her relative into a hospital bed that may no longer exist, or into a home, if there is a place there.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman *rose*——

Ms. Richardson: No, I shall not give way again. The hon. Lady can make her own speech in a moment.

The Government have created a cruel and inhuman situation, and have added unnecessary burdens to the already overburdened carers. Moreover, if the legislation is implemented, it will pose real problems for the security —and, sadly for some, the safety—of women. I cannot put the case better than it was put by the Women's National Commission—which is, after all, sponsored and supported by the Government. In its evidence on the poll tax, the commission said:

"It seems likely that joint and several liability for husbands and wives and for common law partners will be repeated in the legislation for England and Wales".

The commission was discussing the Scottish legislation.

"Presumably, the Government assumes that husbands will pay the tax bill of their non-working wives. It is difficult to see what advantage the community charge has over rates in these circumstances."

I echo that.

"It is also difficult to see how this matches the objective of all adults paying the local tax. Women may not like the assumption, but they may have no option but to ask their husbands to pay."

I hope that the House will support the amendment. Clause 16 must be deleted. It must be replaced with the only measures that can seriously tackle the discrimination and injustice at the heart of the Bill. Such measures must address the ability to pay of every individual at every level.

9 pm

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I want to speak briefly about amendment No. 147, which seeks to get rid of clause 16, concerning joint and several liability. Joint and several liability offends the most basic of liberal values, which hold that everyone should be treated as an individual and not be assessed as an appendage to someone else. As we said in Committee, joint and several liability will lead to a gross invasion of privacy.

For example, how will a registration officer assess who is living together as husband and wife? Will local authorities use the same criteria as the DHSS uses for benefit entitlement? If so, our fears are legitimate. If the registration officer uses the same criteria, he or she will have to establish that the couple in question usually lives in the same house and has a stable relationship. How can that be found out? He will also have to ascertain whether two people have a sexual relationship. That is the most intrusive and repugnant part of the information-gathering exercise. Are the people known by neighbours and friends as a married couple? In other words, is there public acknowledgement of their state, or will the information be gleaned from local gossip? This is a charter for clipes and snoopers.

Joint and several liability places women in a particularly difficult position in cases of separation or divorce, as we have already heard. After splitting up with her partner a woman may find that he had failed to pay his poll tax bill and she will therefore be liable for his bill, in arrears, for the period during which she lived with him. Gingerbread, the single parents' organisation, tells us that women are often left to sort out the finances after marital breakup—gas and electricity bills, and so on. We have no reason to suppose that the poll tax liabilities will be any different.

The consequences for women are potentially horrible, especially for those who may be in an unhappy marriage in which they stick it out for the sake of their children. Husbands and wives, and men and women living together as such, will receive individual bills, but the non-earning or low-paid wife will find herself having to go, perhaps, to a bullying and harsh husband to ask him to pay her poll tax. Not every Conservative Member may be aware of how much verbal and physical abuse goes on in domestic circumstances—in private and public. I am aware of it because of my former employment in the National Health Service, and it can be frightening and distressing for the couples involved—particularly the women.

The concept of joint and several liability undermines the Government's basic case for the poll tax. They say that by charging each individual they will increase the tax base, thus enhancing local government accountability; but by making one person responsible for two, they are, in practical terms, reducing the tax base.

We do not want only individual liability: we want individual assessment. If the Government are unwilling to remove joint and several liability from the Bill, they should at least review it. For example, rather than having complete joint liability, why not have one-way liability, whereby a local authority would be obliged to take into account the respective resources of the spouses when deciding whom to pursue for poll tax arrears? It should not be able to pursue a spouse who would have been entitled to a rebate in respect of the poll tax if she or he had been assessed on an individual basis. That would at least be a

step towards individual assessment, and one of this group of amendments goes some way towards it. In any case, the Government should withdraw the clause and rethink the issue.

The Secretary of State said on the radio this morning that the Government were honouring a commitment made at the election to abolish the rate system and introduce a fair community charge, and that that had been overwhelmingly endorsed by the electorate. He was wrong on both counts. The poll tax is unfair, and to say that the commitment was endorsed by the people of this country is farcical.

Because of our crazy electoral system, the Government have a majority of over 100 seats, but they choose to ignore the reality that just over 13·5 million people voted for them while over 18 million people voted against them and against the poll tax. It has to be said again and again that the poll tax proposals are fundamentally flawed because they are unfair. They are immoral simply because they do not relate to ability to pay.

Mr. Butterfill: I hesitate to intrude in arguments being propounded by lady Members of the Opposition, but I do so because something should be said about the general principle of joint and several liability. Earlier I asked the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) whether she objected to the principle that applies in some cases, but not all, that a husband should be responsible for his wife's debts, being extended to a wife.

Many of the Opposition arguments that we have heard in other debates imply that men and women should be treated equally in all things. To some extent, lady Members of the Opposition are seeking to have their cake and eat it. I can understand why they wish to do that, but I wish that they would be rather more consistent in their arguments.

Mrs. Wise: Has the hon. Gentleman overlooked the fact that the amendment that we are discussing calls for the deletion of clause 16? That would relieve husbands just as much as wives of joint and several liability.

Mr. Butterfill: I have not overlooked that. I was looking at the principle underlying the arguments advanced by the hon. Ladies and the reasons that they are putting forward, and they seem to support the general tenor of my argument.

When one goes further and looks at the practicalities, one sees that the problem is perhaps being overstated by the Opposition. To begin with, a wife who had been abandoned by her husband would not be responsible for the poll tax liability under joint and several liability after the time at which the husband had left the matrimonial home. She would be likely to be pursued under joint and several liability only if the local government officer charged with the responsibility for collecting the tax thought that her resources were likely to be greater than those of the husband and that he would be more likely to make a poll tax collection by pursuing her than by pursuing the husband.

The whole concept of joint and several liability, which applies not just in this area but in many other areas—for example, in partnership law—is that the person seeking to collect the debt may collect it from any one of the persons who are jointly and severally liable, and the tendency is to go for the person most likely to be able to pay. I suggest to the hon. Member for Preston that in most cases the husband's financial position may well remain better than that of the wife, certainly in the circumstances that most concern the hon. Lady. Therefore, it is likely that in most cases the local government officer will still seek to recover from the husband rather than from the wife. He will be likely to seek recovery from the wife only when he knows that she has significant assets or assets that are adequate to enable her to meet the liability.

Mr. Cousins: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that in the northern region at least 40,000 women are the main earners in families where the husbands are unemployed, and that, under subsequent Government amendments, very often the low earnings of those 40,000 women can be attached to meet any poll tax default by their husbands?

Mr. Butterfill: I am well aware of the situation described by the hon. Gentleman, but I do not think that even he would suggest that more women than men are the principal earners in households, even in the region that he represents. I recognise the problems of that region, but, overwhelmingly, the male will be the principal earner in most households, although that situation is changing in various parts of the country. It is changing in London, where a large number of women may well be earning larger salaries than their husbands. We recognise that that is a new phenomenon in some parts of the country, although it can be explained by different reasons in the north and south of the country.

There would be no point in a local government officer pursuing for debt an abandoned wife who is in a poor economic situation, because she could not afford to meet that debt. Even if he took the matter to court, it would be unlikely that a judge would order a distraint upon the home when the home contains little more than the bare necessities of life. That problem should not, therefore, concern Opposition Members to the extent that it obviously has done. If we are talking about a general principle, it is entirely equitable and reasonable, and I should have thought acceptable to Opposition Members, that in most matters men and women should be treated equally.

Ms. Mowlam: I should like to speak briefly in support of the excellent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson), seeking to remove clause 16, and to explain why this part of the poll tax legislation is so negative and such a nightmare that many of us never dreamt that it would be implemented.

I should like to begin by responding to the two points raised by the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill). First, he will be well within his rights to say that we want our cake and to eat it, when we have part of that cake. When we have equal pay for equal work and equal work for equal pay, we shall begin to entertain those arguments. When equal rights legislation is implemented, we shall entertain that kind of discussion, but not before.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman must realise that he is in the realms of fantasy. He must remember that the Bill places the local authority in a Catch 22 situation. Although he sat through 150 hours of Committee proceedings along with me, I must remind him that the Minister said then that, if the husband does a runner—it is more likely to be the husband who does that—the local authority will try to locate the husband. What about the question of cost that the local authority has to face with no extra funding? A certain level of poll tax that the local

[Ms. Mowlam]

authority must obtain will be set, but, if the husband cannot be located, what does the local authority do? Does it say, "We're sorry. We're not going to collect that money?" Then it will be penalised by central Government for not collecting the money, so it will go for the person, usually the woman, who is left in the house.

The Minister did a body swerve on that point. He tried to weave and bob over the question whether the local authority would issue a distress order. If one reads the report carefully, one sees that that is up to the local authority, but, if it is put in that Catch 22 situation, and has to get the money, clearly we know what it——

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Mowlam: No, I shall not give way, as a number of Labour Members wish to speak. The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West has already made a fair contribution tonight.

The distress order would be issued and the woman would be faced with the bill, the distress order and the loss of furniture. That is why the hon. Gentleman is not being honest to women when explaining the effects of this part of the legislation.

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Mowlam: No, I shall not give way.

I should like to emphasise the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) last night, that the full impact of this part of the legislation will become real to the majority of people only when they experience it, just as happened with the social security legislation. We are talking about 1 million co-habitees, not just the odd thousand, and 25 per cent. of married people. We are talking about a large percentage of the population who will feel the full impact of the legislation.

Let us look briefly at what will happen if this farce of a clause is not withdrawn tonight. A couple will sit down and begin to pay the bills—electricity, gas and telephone. When the two poll tax bills arrive, will one say, "Here's yours dear and this is mine"? I cannot believe it. This clause undermines the principle that the Government have been talking about throughout the legislation—that is local accountability, a personal poll tax and people seeing the services that they get—and makes it clear that this is not what the Bill is about. If we link it, although the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) does not have the intellectual capacity to make that link, with poll capping, we clearly see central Government attacking local authorities to the death.

9.15 pm

The Minister was economical with the truth in Committee when he talked about joint and several liability because he implied that it will come into practice only when a couple is splitting up or there is a divorce. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Barking made clear, it will work before that. For example, 40 per cent. of married women have no independent income. What will happen? The wage earner will pay two poll taxes. Three quarters of women earn below the average wage of men and are part-time workers and low-paid workers. They will be paying not individual bills but joint bills as a family unit. Furthermore, when there is a divorce or separation, the splitting of the poll tax will not work from day one. As a result of the Government's social security changes, women cannot register as unemployed if they are married, so they cannot claim rebate. Women are penalised by a combination of the poll tax and social security changes, and they will suffer.

Let us look briefly at how joint and several liability will work. This has already been dealt with, so I will touch on it only briefly. I would like to know, but I shall not give him a chance to explain it, the opinion of the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West as to how the local authority chases the richest partner. He said earlier that all that would be on the register would be the name and address of each individual. He is now suggesting that the local registration officer will know how much everybody earns. Clearly, such information will be on the register, if not at the beginning, halfway through, when joint and several liability has to be implemented. Clearly, as in social security, neighbours will have to snoop about sexual relationships so that the officer can work out whether there should be joint or several liability.

The operation of this will be farcical. Often, when couples split up, they separate for a couple of weeks, try to patch it up again, and split up again. The local registration officer will have to say, "Well, you argued the morning of the Tuesday so we don't count the three days when you were apart, but then you got back together for four days, so those four days you are liable for if he goes again." Whose word do we believe when somebody sees them walk through the door at 10 past nine? Does that count as a day when working out joint and several liability? Goodness knows how it will be implemented. I pity the poor registration officer who will have to work out such details. The Pontius Pilate attitude that we have seen exhibited by Ministers, who wash their hands of the matter and say that local authorities will decide, is reprehensible when the Government will corner local authorities and make them get the money in.

The Secretary of State obviously does not want the title of feminist which the Chancellor of the Exchequer was after—feeble though it was, he at least introduced a move towards independent taxation for women—because clause 16 clearly penalises women. The clause shows that poll tax is part of the problem, but it is not a solution to the problems that face many people, particularly women, in this society.

The Minister for Local Government says in an article he wrote for the *Local Government Chronicle*:

"No one could have thought it possible to do this"—

that is, to implement the poll tax—

"while pleasing absolutely everyone."

It has become blatantly obvious, especially in the past couple of days, that it is not a question of the Minister pleasing everyone; it is a question of the Minister pleasing anyone. Conservative Back Benchers did not support the Front Bench on this issue. Across the board, society after society, such as the CBI, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, and the Rating and Valuation Association, criticised the legislation.

If the clause is not amended or withdrawn, the majority of women in this country will suffer from an unfair and unjust measure. The Minister told us yesterday that we are looking for the holy grail. Women are looking for justice and fairness in the poll tax legislation. If clause 16 is not withdrawn, certainly we shall not see that.

Mrs. Wise: The poll tax legislation is bad enough for women in any case because they frequently have no income, and, if they are working, they are low-wage earners. Even a woman who is on her own and a low wage earner will be penalised by this legislation because she will pay a higher proportion of her income than do most men. This is bad for women.

Clause 16 makes the situation for women infinitely worse. Many couples have only one income. I assure the Minister that we are complaining about the clause because it is detrimental to both sexes. It is almost always the case that things that are detrimental to women are detrimental to both sexes in the final analysis. It is bad for a husband to be regarded as liable for his wife's debts, and to have this fresh debt put on him. It is wrong from the viewpoint of both husband and wife, because the whole ethos is that the wife is an appendage to her husband. He has a burden because he has a wife and she lacks dignity because she is a wife. That situation is equally bad for both partners and not conducive to the development of a healthy marriage.

A couple with one income is being doubly taxed. It is no consolation to the woman, who feels that she brings this debt with her by her very existence, that her husband must pay the bill. As has been pointed out, where there is stress or strain on a marriage, this is yet another complaint that a husband may make. A husband may be minded to say, "You have not brought in a penny. Why do you think you have a right to say how the household will be organised?" The poll tax will create intolerable stress in unhappy marriages. It is also demeaning for both partners to a happy marriage. The husband, at least, is that much more likely to have the wherewithal to meet the debt than the wife.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), who has left the Chamber, said that local authorities will go after the husband because he is the richer partner. But the hon. Gentleman has not understood that local authorities will go after the accessible partner, the person left in the house, whether a man or a woman. That is the person whose whereabouts are known, and it will more often be the woman than the man. Whoever it is, it is an iniquitous situation. Of course, it will usually be the partner who also has the liability for the children. Therefore, it is the person who is on the spot and usually already carrying an unfair part of the former family's burden.

The fact that we are asking for the removal of clause 16 shows that we want a more truly equal approach for men and women in this matter. It has been said that we should be pleased that men and women are being given an equal burden; that wives will be responsible for their husbands' liability and husbands for their wives' liability. I must inform Conservative Members that when we ask for equality we mean equalling up, not down. We want everybody to be treated not only equally but well, and that is what the Bill signally fails to do.

There is the problem of those who are not formally married. Who is to decide whether people are living together as man and wife? Surely social security problems have given rise to enough experience to enable all hon. Members to understand what a minefield any discussion of cohabitation is. Will there be a repetition of those disgraceful events when widows who take lodgers are deemed thereby to have entered into a marital relationship? All hon. Members have had experiences in their constituencies of the kind of disgraceful things that happen when officialdom has to decide whether people are living together.

The wording of the clause is most odd. It has been said that responsibility for future debts extends only to members of the household—that they are not responsible once the family is broken up. That drew my attention to the wording of the clause. I did not have the good fortune, or misfortune, to serve on the Committee. I was not aware of every dot and comma in the Bill. Clause 16 provides:

"For the purposes of this section people are married to each other if they are a man and woman—

(a) who are married to each other and are members of the same household, or

(b) who are not married to each other but are living together as husband and wife."

Then it goes on to say:

"For the purposes of this section people are not married to each other on a particular day unless they are married to each other throughout the day."

If couples say that they are living together on a certain day, how will the matter be judged by the local authority? This is even worse than the social security system, and that is bad enough. I do not know whether Conservative Members understand the social security system—I hope that it is being brought radically to their attention at the moment—but anyone who does will know that the excuse for the cohabitation rule is that women who are claimants must not be treated more favourably than married women who cannot be claimants. That at least has some basis in logic, even though I disagree with it. But in this case, the Government are deliberately laying a trap. There would be no need for a cohabitation rule if there was not already joint and several liability for married couples.

The Government are extremely ill-advised in pursuing this matter. The women of Britain will see that the Government have every reason to regret it unless they agree to delete the clause.

9.30 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): I wish to support the case so well made by Opposition Members against this clause. I endorse what the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) has said about cohabitation, because the clause does not tell us who decides whether a couple are living together as man and wife. We can only assume that the registration officer's staff will have that unpleasant duty. The clause does not tell us what criteria are to be used. Like other hon. Members, I can only assume that they are going to be the sort of criteria that are now used in social security cases.

The hon. Member for Preston referred to unpleasant cases. I have had at least two cases of 70-year-old widows who have been accused of cohabiting with young men living in their homes and have lost their social security benefits as a result. But at least in cases like that there is an appeal machinery; a person who loses a social security benefit has an opportunity of going to appeal. As far as I can see, in this clause there is no appeal mechanism of any kind.

It seems to be suggested that we are going to have unpleasant snooping and peering into windows to see who is sleeping where and what is going on inside a household where there is said to be cohabitation. In some parts of the country the registration officer's staff will be extremely busy because in London and the south-east, for example, there are many cases of young people who get together in order to purchase a home. It may look as if they are

[Mr. John Cartwright]

cohabiting, but often what they are doing—to use the phrase that one of them once used to me—is sharing a roof but not a ceiling. It will be extremely difficult for the registration officer to establish that sort of relationship. From what I know of local authority officers, I cannot believe that they will welcome this business of being turned into a team of poll tax snoopers, which will be the result of this legislation.

I want to draw on some constituency experience to explore what this clause will mean in certain cases. Take the case of a man who moves in with a woman and her children, establishes a relationship and lives with her for a period. Perhaps it does not work out and he moves on, but he failed to register for the community charge while he was there and the local authority discovered that he was there. That may be why he moved on. The woman in that situation would find herself liable to pay his community charge. If she claimed that he was merely a lodger in her home, which he might well have been, it would be extremely difficult to prove because the fact could not be proved, so she would be stuck with that situation.

Let us take the break-up of a relationship. A number of examples have been quoted of what happens in such a break-up. Presumably the joint and several liability to community charge will cease on divorce. That is clear, straightforward and undeniable. But separation is very much more difficult to define. At what point, for the purpose of paying the community charge, does that relationship end? Is it when the man physically leaves the property? Is it when the relationship has broken down and they have ceased to live with each other as man and wife? It is almost impossible to explain that and make it work in any fair or rational way.

Mr. Dalyell: It was put to me by one distraught local government officer that we shall need a battalion of Sherlock Holmeses to sort it out.

Mr. Cartwright: We had some discussion yesterday about the relative costs of various systems of paying for local services, but I think that the cost of administering this appalling tax is something that the Government have not even begun to work out.

Coming back to the question of the break-up of a relationship, the working partner is usually, if not always, the man. It is the man who tends to depart, because it is the woman who is left to look after the children and she therefore finds it much more difficult to disappear and evade responsibility. If the working partner—in this case we will assume that it is the man—has departed, leaving his non-employed partner behind, he is not likely, the relationship having broken up, to want to pay her community charge. He may well find it possible to disappear and not be traced. He may well have told his partner that he has paid the poll tax when he has not paid all of it, and there may be a substantial part of it outstanding. In that case, we know that the woman who is left in the home will be liable to the charge. We know that that is what will happen because it happens now.

After the break-up of a relationship, the woman is left behind with the children and she is pursued by the local authority for rent arrears and for the gas, electricity and other debts that have been built up on a family basis. I am convinced that that is what will happen with the poll tax. I cannot see that the woman would be entitled to claim a rebate because the charge would have been assessed on the basis of her partner's earnings.

There was much discussion yesterday of the anomalies that will flow from alternatives to the Government's proposals. The Bill is riddled with anomalies, and some of the worst anomalies and injustices will flow from clause 16. If the Government cannot accept this amendment, I hope that they will think through the clause again in order to prevent the injustice that will be done to women who can least afford to suffer. Lone parents in the inner cities, those who are most at risk, will be the least able to bear the burden that the poll tax will place upon them.

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): Some years ago I remarried. My husband, who is a Norwegian, came to England a week before our wedding to get the special licence. He used my address at the register office. A few weeks later I had a letter from the DHSS in Newcastle which said that at the register office my husband gave the same address as mine. I was asked whether I was co-habiting at the same time as I was receiving a widow's pension. I was able to explain that my husband had come to England a week before the wedding. The DHSS withdrew their allegation and apologised, but I was furious at the snooping. That was before the Government data network had appeared on the scene.

Can the extent of the snooping that this clause will create be imagined? When I related my experience to my predecessor in the House, he told me about a case that he had had in Tower Hamlets. It concerned a 75-year-old woman who had had a DHSS snooper arrive at her house. He looked through the house and found that her lodger's greatcoat was in her bedroom wardrobe. She had allowed him to keep it there during the summer because there was a shortage of wardrobe space. Her widow's pension was taken away and my predecessor had to take up her case. If that has already been happening, what on earth will happen countrywide over this poll tax clause?

Unemployed married women will be unable to claim a rebate because they cannot register for social security. There is also to be the indignity of joint and several liability. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) has left the Chamber so early in the debate because he asked a question that I shall answer. We are against joint and several liability, whether it is the husband who is liable for his wife's debts or whether it is the wife who is liable for her husband's debts. Women are not chattels. We stand on our own two feet. Nevertheless, we do not want to bear unnecessary burdens.

In my constituency there are many families from Bangladesh. On the whole, the women stay at home and do not work outside it. They have extended families and take good care of their old people. The anticipated poll tax in Tower Hamlets will be astronomical—nearly £700. When the Inner London education authority is broken up, an additional amount for education will be added to that sum. The men are often in very low-paid jobs, because that is all that is available to them. The burdens on those families will be absolutely incredible. If a husband returns to Bangladesh, his wife will be left with a crushing burden that she will be unable to meet. She may end up by being put into prison for debt. The clause is pernicious. Therefore, I support its removal.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): One of the more farcical aspects of this clause, which has not been mentioned, is that, although husbands and wives, and couples living together—male and female—will be liable for each other's poll tax, homosexual or lesbian couples will not. It could be argued that this Government, who have been so keen in pursuing clause 28 of the Local Government Bill, are promoting homosexuality. People will work out that it will be cheaper to live in a homosexual relationship than a heterosexual one. Furthermore, one will be even better off if one goes to prison because one will not pay any poll tax at all.

The farce does not stop there. Part of the Government's argument on accountability is that the present rating system undermines accountability on the grounds that, although there are 35 million voters, half are ratepayers but the other half are not. The Tory argument is that only the ratepayer pays any attention to the rates bill and to the services and the quality of services that are provided. That is obviously nonsensical, because any person who has been a councillor, or who holds surgeries, will know who the people are who complain about local authority services. At least nine times out of 10 it is the wife of a couple who comes along. By and large, community councils and tenants' associations are run by women. They are the backbone of those organisations. It is utter nonsense to say that, because a man's name appears on the tenancy agreement or on the mortgage payment, only he pays any attention to the rates and his wife does not know anything about it. In every household in the land, and particularly in Scotland where these things are to the fore because registration is going on right now, women are indignant. However, mostly they are amused at the idea that they pay no attention to how much the rates are, because it is the man who takes responsibility for paying and for complaining when things go wrong.

We have spent many hours in Committee on this subject. We know the thinking of Conservative Members. I have noticed that not too many of them have come along to argue their case. They must be aware of how weak a case it is. However, we did hear in Committee how they envisaged it. They imagine a situation where, some time in the future, when the yearly poll tax bill comes through the door, a couple are sitting down at breakfast. The wife will say something like this. "Have you seen your poll tax bill this morning, darling?". The husband will say, "Yes, love. Have you noticed that it is £20 more than last year?" His wife will say to him, "And why is that? Is it because of inflation? Is it because of redistribution of the business rate from one authority to another? Could it be because of Government cutbacks? Might it have something to do with the latest pay increase for teachers, clerks, binmen or whoever?" He will say, "No, dear, it is because we have a high-spending, loony-Left Labour council. Let us write to that nice Mr. Ridley and tell him that he should poll-cap this local authority." The wife will say, "If you say so, dear. You know so much more about these things than I do." That is the picture that the Government have painted of the future. Couples will responsibly discuss their poll tax bills together. The Government imagine that today couples never discuss their rate bills. What utter piffle. The whole country knows that it is piffle, except for Conservative Members.

Mr. Dalyell: Throughout these debates, I simply confine myself to a question. Ministers might listen to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) because we are a year ahead in Scotland. Therefore, the matter becomes that much more urgent.

What factual work has been done in the Department on the sheer mechanics of doing the tracing? I interrupted the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) by saying that one distraught local government officer has said that we would need a whole battalion of Sherlock Holmeses to do the tracing. If it is difficult in my constituency, it will be that much more difficult in Hackney or in any London area where there are a large number of immigrants.

The factual question is how much manpower is it estimated will necessarily have to be available to do the tracing, especially for asking the most delicate questions about relationships between people?

The whole business started with the Prime Minister, like Henry Plantagenet, saying, "Who will rid me of Becket or the rates?" The Secretary of State has said, "I will do the job", but they have not thought it through. All those things are coming home to roost. Let the Minister have time, but let him answer the question: what factual estimate is there of the amount of man or womanpower that will be required for tracing those difficult cases? He can get the answer from his civil servants in the Box if that research has been done.

9.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): I begin by welcoming the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) to our deliberations on this Bill. Her speech was extraordinary because it purported to put forward the interests of women, but failed to appreciate several crucial facts about our Bill, which will be very much in favour of women. I remind the House that 80 per cent. of single parents will be better off with the community charge than with the rates. I am sure that most Opposition Members will accept that the majority of single parents are women.

Those Opposition Members who are aware of the financial problems that often arise on divorce, and in cases where an earning spouse moves out of the matrimonial home, leaving the wife behind, will appreciate that under the present rating system the rates bill remains the same, regardless of the number of people who occupy the house. However, under our proposals, when one adult leaves the house and only one is left, the community charge bill will be reduced accordingly.

Mr. Rooker: What about joint and several liability?

Mr. Chope: I shall come to the issue of joint and several liability in a moment.

The second crucial issue that the hon. Member for Barking overlooked was that 80 per cent. of single pensioner households will also be better off under the Bill. Again, most single pensioner households are women. Furthermore, the hon. Lady failed to identify the benefits to women, especially to non-working wives, of joint and several liability. If the husband has the money and refuses to pay for his wife, his wife need not worry because the enforcement action can be taken against the husband. When income support is paid to husbands and wives, it is paid to one spouse on behalf of both. To take the point made by the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise), if the husband holds the purse strings, it is probably he who will accept the responsibility for paying both bills, or vice

[Mr. Chope]

versa. The spouse who does not hold the purse strings will be protected rather than penalised by having joint and several liability.

There has been a lot of muddled thinking on this issue —*[Interruption.]* Yes, on the part of the Opposition. Anyone listening to the debate would be surprised to learn some of the recent history of this matter. When the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Bill was before the House in Committee and the issue of joint and several liability was raised, in that Bill, as originally drafted, joint and several liability applied only to spouses —in other words, to married couples. However, an amendment was tabled to extend that to unmarried couples. That amendment was put forward by none other than the Labour party. Opposition Members proposed and supported an amendment to extend joint and several liability to unmarried couples. Today they are suggesting that joint and several liability should be removed from the Bill.

The hon. Member for Preston said that surely there was enough experience for people to realise what a minefield the whole area was. Perhaps she should have said that to her Front Bench colleagues when the Scottish Bill was going through Parliament. When other Opposition Front Bench spokesmen were handling the matter in Committee on this Bill, they had the grace to be embarrassed when the Scottish experience was drawn to their attention, but there has not been any equivalent shame in this debate.

The hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright), among others, raised the issue of snooping. This shows that there is a misunderstanding about the stage at which joint and several liability arises. The personal community charge is in the first instance always an individual liability.

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

Mr. Chope: I will not give way, because I have a number of points to make. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said that it was important that I should answer the points which had been raised in debate, and I shall do my best to do so.

The bill will be addressed to the individual and should be paid by the person concerned. The reason why that is so important is that a MORI poll carried out for the Audit Commission showed that people who do not receive rate bills are three times less likely than those who do to know whether rate bills have gone up or down, let alone by how much. That is why the concept of an individual bill addressed to each adult is so important for the principle of accountability. There will not be household bills, and couples will not be liable for the bills of any elderly relatives or grown-up children who live with them.

The fact that the community charge will be an individual liability applies also to married and unmarried couples. In the majority of cases, they will have the resources to pay their own bills, resources against which enforcement action will be taken if they fail to pay. Of married women, 60 per cent. have earnings of their own, and that figure is rising steadily. Other married women have income from other sources, such as investments.

It is not the registration officer who decides whether joint and several liability exists. As we have repeatedly made clear, joint and several liability is an enforcement and not a registration matter. It will arise only if the bill is not paid. Where that happens, the local authority will attempt to enforce against the individual concerned.

If, having obtained a liability order, the local authority establishes that the individual concerned has no income of his or her own, and no or few assets, it will become apparent that the person is being provided for by someone else. The local authority may then need to pursue that partner under the joint and several liability provisions.

Contrary to the statement of the hon. Member for Woolwich, it will be possible to appeal against joint and several liability. Before a local authority can pursue a partner, it will have to send him or her a bill and a reminder, and convince the magistrates court that if the bill has not by then been paid, joint and several liability exists. If the partner does not accept that he or she should be jointly and severally liable, there will be an opportunity to say so. If the local authority does not prove its case, the magistrate will not issue the necessary order.

For those people who are living together as man and wife and who wish to retain the privacy of their relationship, there is no need for any official or snooper to be involved. So long as each individual pays his or her own community charge bill, the problem will be resolved. Only when a bill has not been paid and a community charge is outstanding will the registration officer be involved.

The points made about amendment No. 148 raise legitimate concerns about what happens when marriages break down and past debts are taken on by the family. Often, if the wife was left behind, she might feel that she had an obligation to pay the outstanding community charges which were not paid by her husband. Certainly I take very much on board the discretion which we are giving local authorities in the matter.

Local authorities can be trusted to use sensibly the powers of enforcement set out in the schedule to the Bill. The fact that they have certain powers does not mean that they will or should use them indiscriminately, any more than if one spouse leaves and there is a large electricity bill it means that the electricity authority must use its powers of enforcement indiscriminately.

In advising local authorities on the use of these powers, I propose to recommend them to bear in mind the sort of circumstance described during this debate and to devote their energies to tracking down the husband rather than to pursuing the deserted wife.

We have had a debate based on a misapprehension by the Opposition about exactly the stage at which joint and several liability arises. Earlier, the Opposition were in favour of joint and several liability—indeed, were in favour of extending it—so I find it amazing that tonight they have changed their mind completely.

Ms. Richardson: With the leave of the House, I rise in the remaining minutes of this debate, during which the speeches from our side were excellent. *[Laughter.]* There was nothing to compare them with, because, apart from the Minister's speech, there was only one speech from the other side. It shows how committed Conservative Members are to the rights of women that they all left the Chamber.

The Minister talked about those who would not be affected by joint and several liability because they are one-parent families. His speech bordered on the sexist and was certainly breathtakingly unaware of the realities of life today. The truly damning aspect of all the Minister's

so-called assurances is that they are assurances that the Government intend to wash their hands of every consequence of their actions.

Local authorities will be made to make these judgments of Solomon and will be open to condemnation whichever way they turn. They will be blamed for what the Government have done. If local authorities wipe off debts, they will be forced to use the extra local taxes from the rest of the community. If they set up search-and-find units, they will be accused of creating further layers of bureaucracy and of snooping and policing people's private lives. The Minister will have removed himself from all the responsibility and accountability wrapped up in the tatters of his measure which he asks us to believe is designed to protect women and rescue them from the burden of the poll tax and their partners' anger at having to pay it.

It is not paternalistic, ineffectual protection that women demand, but rights and a proper and full recognition of the value of their contribution as unpaid carers. They also demand the full recognition of the financial penalty which they suffer as a result of their caring responsibilities, whether or not in paid work. It is the Government's consistent failure to address those complexities and the realities of women's lives which render them incapable of ever producing legislation which is fair to half the population.

I remind the House of the points that I made in moving the amendment. Although women are now half the labour force, they still earn less than three-quarters of men's average pay. More than half of all full-time women workers and three quarters of part-time women workers are classified as low paid. Five and a half million adult women, representing a quarter of the work force and earning less than the European decency threshold, will be expected to pay the same flat rate of poll tax as a millionaire and to be responsible for the arrears of a defaulting partner.

The position is even more bleak for full-time unpaid carers, who will continue to face the same circumstances with no independent income. There is, of course, only one way——

Mr. Chope *rose*——

Ms. Richardson: I do not have the time to give way.

There is only one way for the Government to tackle the serious flaws in the Bill and that is to remove clause 16. I invite right hon. and hon. Tory Members as well as my hon. Friends to vote for the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:-

The House divided: Ayes 220, Noes 325.

Division No. 265] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*

Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Frank Cook.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mothihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*

Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Richard Ryder.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Ten o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Orders [22 February and 13 April] and the Resolution yesterday, to put forthwith the Question on amendments moved by a member of the Government up to the end of clause 20.*

Clause 20

STANDARD COMMUNITY CHARGE: SPECIAL CASES

Amendment made: No. 66, in page 13, line 24, leave out from beginning to end of line 27 and insert—

'(a) a county council,
(b) a district council,
(c) a London borough council,
(d) the Common Council,'.—*[Mr. Ridley.]*

Further consideration of the Bill adjourned.—[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]

Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee), to be further considered tomorrow.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Ways and Means Motion may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

Local Government Finance Bill [Ways and Means]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That any Act resulting from the Local Government Finance Bill may provide for

(a) sums to be paid to the Secretary of State in respect of non-domestic rating, and
(b) those and other sums to be paid into the Consolidated Fund.—[*Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.*]

10.15 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I want to speak by way of inquisition and inquiry because I have great difficulty in understanding the mechanism by which we arrive at the allocation of funds. We do not know the amount to be raised, how it is to be disposed across the country or what effect it will have on local businesses; nor do we know what its impact on the country will be.

This may be an intellectual difficulty, but it is also practical in terms of the business and interests that we serve and of the economy of our country. We have no idea what the sum of money to be raised will be, or where it will fall—on London or on my constituency in the midlands. In the absence of revaluation we cannot identify what the sum of money is, yet the Government are asking us to march to the sound of trumpets to allocate large sums of money, without knowing what they are. It is a monstrous proposal that the House of Commons should give taxation to a Government without knowing the quantum. I wait to hear from the Government what the quantum to be raised is, and I want to know its impact on the north-west, the north-east and the rest of our nation.

The Government cannot give me any of these figures. What an absurd tax! If the House of Commons stands for anything, it stands for the control of the supply of money. We are giving the Government the right to raise money without the amount being known by the House. I want the Government to explain to me the effects of raising this money on the economic life of my country and on employment and the generation of business. In many ways this issue is fundamental to the economic purpose of my country.

Why do we arrive almost at Third Reading of a Bill in these circumstances? The House exists to grant money, yet the Government cannot tell me how much money they will raise and what that will do for business. Casually, we are saying that this should go through on the nod and that we shall ascribe these funds to the Consolidated Fund Bill, whose purposes and allocation we do not know—and I am asked to support that. That is why, with the greatest respect, this should be challenged and we should hear facts and figures in advance of the debate. We should hear of the amelioration of some of the effects—not the detail or the quantum, but merely some hypothetical amelioration for the next five years.

I ask these questions by way of a preface to considering whether we should support this money going into the Consolidated Fund tonight, in advance of Thursday's debate and of the revaluation next year that will give us many of the answers to these questions.

10.19 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): I well understand why my hon. Friend

[Mr. Nicholas Ridley]

wants to inquire about the meaning of this resolution and why it is on the Order Paper. The answer to his main question about how much this will raise is that, currently, the non-domestic rate yields about £8·5 billion and it is the Government's intention that a similar sum should be raised by the new form of non-domestic rate contained in the Bill.

We made it clear that we would not increase the non-domestic rate and that the total would be redistributed according to the revaluation that is currently taking place and, of course, according to the uniform rate poundage that will be imposed by the Bill. I cannot forecast the individual rate bills of each and every commercial hereditament that will result from these changes because the revaluation is not yet complete. I shall have much more to say about that on Thursday when we will be able to discuss the whole matter.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: Is my right hon. Friend saying that he cannot tell me, even in the most general terms, whether the west midlands will be paying a significantly higher tax, the same tax or a lower tax, because of the one critical factor that enables the House to judge the merits of the proposal—revaluation? If it is, how can he come to the House and propose that we raise unknown taxes that will have an unknown effect on vital constituency interests of every hon. Member? Hon. Members have not been aroused about this because of the absence of this knowledge and the diffidence of the Secretary of State about a fundamental point.

Mr. Ridley: Revaluation has taken place for decades in respect of rates on domestic and business premises. It is never possible to predict the results of revaluation before the revaluation takes place. There is nothing new about having a non-domestic rate revaluation.

I should like to make one other point to my hon. Friend. It is necessary to have this resolution because the Government had a choice whether to set up a separate fund for the payment of the non-domestic rate by local authorities which would then be redistributed per capita and pro rata to every local authority, or to pay the money into the Consolidated Fund and redistribute it in the way that I have described.

We decided that it would be cheaper and therefore provide a little more revenue for local authorities if the money was paid into the Consolidated Fund rather than into a separate fund set up for the sole purpose of redistributing this £8·5 billion. As a result of that decision, this money resolution is needed to make sure that the Consolidated Fund can receive and pay out the money in question. There is no change of policy here, nor is there anything new, except for the point that I have made, that instead of a separate fund we shall use the Consolidated Fund. That is a sensible decision.

I shall be happy to respond to any of my hon. Friend's points about the impact or the effect of the non-domestic rate in the debate on the Bill on Thursday. That is the proper time at which to raise these matters.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. If my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) is right in saying that the House is being asked to debate the money resolution before the substantive debate takes place on Thursday, can you tell us how you have been advised in this procedural matter? Surely it must be the wrong procedure.

Mr. Speaker: Nothing out of order has taken place. The Government have put down a Ways and Means motion and it can be debated.

10.25 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): To avoid any misunderstanding on either side of the House, let me say that the measure could have gone through on the nod. I hope that we can now dispose of it in a few minutes. Without that agreement, there would not have been five days for the Report stage of the Local Government Finance Bill. If there had not been five days, there would have been no opportunity whatsoever even to discuss the part of the Bill relating to the business rate. That was part of the arrangement agreed between the Front Benches to protect the opportunity for the House to debate the business rate, because that would not have been possible in only four days.

As the Secretary of State has said, the sum of money is the same. The Bill does not invent business rates. They are already there. We do not know the consequences of revaluation and of the unified business rate. We did not discover that in Committee and hon. Members will not even find out about it on Thursday, but, in the limited time available on Thursday, questions can at least be put.

The only point that is questionable, which I raised with the Government earlier, is the use of the words "Consolidated Fund" in the Ways and Means resolution. The fact that the Consolidated Fund will be used has a simple consequence: it then becomes national, not local, taxation. That means that the other place will not be able to discuss the business rate, as opposed to the poll tax, part of the Bill. Hon. Members might consider that point on Thursday.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: If I have understood the matter correctly, we have seen the transfer of the business rate away from the local authorities and, therefore, the transfer of the direct relationship to the national Exchequer. We are to pass the motion on the nod, just to do a cosy deal between the Labour party and the Conservative Government to ensure that we can now get this measure through.

Mr. Rooker: I resent the term "a cosy deal." Opposition Members, in demanding five days, were trying to protect the right to debate the business rate. No Conservative Members were asking for a debate on the business rate. We said, "Right, the Ways and Means resolution, on the nod." It is as simple and clear-cut as that. The decision whether the scheme is carried through is not in the hands of my hon. Friends. It is for hon. Members on Thursday to decide whether to support the Bill. The Bill is not about the rights of the Secretary of State for the Environment. The Bill states that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will henceforth fix the business rate. Hon. Members must either accept or reject that on Thursday.

10.28 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) has done the House a service in drawing attention to some of the features of this Ways and Means resolution, but it also

seems a little distasteful that he should lecture the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) as if he were a recalcitrant schoolboy, misbehaving and daring to interfere in the arrangements into which the hon. Gentleman entered in good faith for perfectly respectable reasons. We can accept his argument that, in reaching an agreement to take the business on the nod, he believed that he was advancing the interests of hon. Members, but that does not preclude the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills from speaking. He is in no way party to that agreement and is drawing the attention of the House to some important matters.

The important dimension that the hon. Gentleman has added to the discussion is the possible impact of this on the consideration of the Bill in another place, which has assumed a greater relevance since the Secretary of State today purported to be in a position to issue Mr. Speaker's certificate and identify which Bill was a money Bill and which Bill could be considered by another place. The Secretary of State, in the remarks that roused me from my slumber this morning, purported to say what Bill the other place could consider and appeared to try to say that the other place had no right to consider the essential features of the Bill. That is not so, but it would be true in respect of the business rate if the resolution goes through. For that reason, the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills is right to draw attention to the matter and the House should take the matter more seriously.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That any Act resulting from the Local Government Finance Bill may provide for

(a) sums to be paid to the Secretary of State in respect of non-domestic rating, and

(b) those and other sums to be paid into the Consolidated Fund.

Community Charges (Scotland)

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): My hon. Friend is taking time.

Mr. Douglas: I know that I am taking time. I do not need my hon. Friends on the Front Bench to tell me that.

On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It will not have escaped your notice that 29 of the amendments to the Local Government Finance Bill, which applies to England and Wales, were tabled by the Secretary of State for Scotland. May I have your assurance that your office has examined these amendments and ensured that they were not in conflict with the regulations that we shall debate tonight and tomorrow night? If they are, we are wasting our time.

Mr. Speaker: I would have to look at those amendments carefully. As far as I am aware, none of them is in conflict with the regulations.

10.30 pm

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Standard and Collective Community Charges (Scotland) Regulations 1988 (S.I., 1988, No. 631), dated 28th March 1988, a copy of which was laid before this House on 30th March, be annulled.

Coming from Scotland, I find it interesting that Tory Members are beginning to get slightly panicky about revaluation. After all, we have been debating the poll tax only because of the panic that developed in Scottish Tory breasts as a result of revaluation. That is what the poll tax is all about. That is why we have got it, and that is why Tory Members may soon be more aware of what revaluation means. However, the poll tax is no answer to the problems of revaluation.

These regulations are not the most controversial part of the poll tax legislation. Nor are they necessarily the most obnoxious, although there are parts of them, particularly those relating to the collective community charge, which raise some important questions. However, the poll tax in all its forms is so hated and despised by the people of Scotland that it is right and essential that we, the representatives of the people of Scotland, should take every opportunity to put their views before the House and vote against any measure that helps to bring this iniquitous legislation into force.

I cannot remember when any Government proposal was so universally opposed in Scotland. The most recent opinion poll in Scotland shows that fewer than 15 per cent. of the people of Scotland support the poll tax. That is nearly 8 per cent. below the level of the Tory vote in Scotland, so 8 per cent. of Tory voters do not support the poll tax. Furthermore, many people who will benefit from the proposals still oppose them because they know that they are unfair, unworkable and undemocratic. Many of them resent strongly the imposition of this tax when they so overwhelmingly voted against it in last June's general election. Any Government who paid even lip service to the concepts of democracy would have withdrawn the tax after their humiliation in that election.

After last night's embarrassments, it is clear that many English Tories fear that they will suffer the same fate as Michael Ancram, Michael Hirst, John McKay, Gerry Malone et al if this tax becomes law in England and Wales. Et al is Albert McQuarrie. That is why we shall take every opportunity to raise the injustices and absurdities of this tax in the House. There is still time for English Tory Back Benchers to come to their political senses and defeat the English and Welsh Bill on its Third Reading, and force the repeal of the Scottish legislation.

These regulations give us the opportunity to debate two of the important but less well publicised aspects of the poll tax in Scotland. The standard charge is the tax imposed on second homes. What these regulations are proposing makes sense since they ensure that houses with no roofs on, or those in need of repair nor redevelopment, should be exempt.

The standard charge is absurd in itself. Having made all the great claims that they were abolishing property taxes and introducing a personal tax right the way down the line, the Government are reintroducing a property tax in the form of the standard charge. The charge is on the property, and no matter how many people live in it and use it the charge will be exactly the same.

It does not matter whether one has already paid a personal community charge or poll tax in a local government area; if one owns a house in that area the same tax will be paid. We who believe in the rating system see nothing wrong with that. It is right to pay rates on a second home. But this makes nonsense of the Government's argument that they are abolishing rates. The standard community charge is just rates in another form—a very unfair form. Everybody will pay exactly the same standard charge whatever the size of house and whatever the income. The Queen will pay on her holiday house at Balmoral exactly the same as someone owning a one-roomed holiday flat in the same area. One cannot get more absurd than that.

If the standard community charge is ridiculous when set against the so-called principles of the poll tax, the collective community charge proposals contain the seeds of even greater unfairness and administrative nightmares than the personal poll tax.

Once the Government settled for the asinine poll tax, someone in the Department presumably asked, "How do we deal with those who move about all the time and have no fixed abode; do we allow them to get away with paying nothing?" Of course Ministers, who are convinced that everybody should pay something, said no to that. There had to be some form of tax. They came up with this nonsensical collective community charge. It means that every boarding house and hostel and other place where the occupants are transient will be designated a collective charge property, and the collective charge multiplier will be given by the assessor. The owners will then pay the personal tax, multiplied by their multiplier, to the local authority each year. They will regain the tax by charging on a daily basis each person resident in their property.

Let me ask the Minister one or two questions about the collective charge. First, why have refuges for women facing domestic violence been left in the collective charge category in Scotland, when it seems that they are to be totally exempt in England? On 4 February 1988 the Minister of State, Department of the Environment said:

"women's refuges . . . will be exempt not merely from the requirements to show the names of resident individuals on the register, but from the collective community charge."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 4 February 1988, c. 462.]

I want to know from the Minister what is happening in Scotland, because in these regulations that is the only type of property at present that would definitely be in the collective community charge category.

Secondly, what arrangements have the Government made for the repayment of the collective community charge to those who are entitled to rebates or who may have already paid their community charge elsewhere? Many people living in hostel accommodation will be entitled to rebates, but their landlord must pay a full poll tax for each of them and charge them the full amount.

In the draft rebate scheme that I have seen there does not appear to be a plan to ensure that they can reclaim this money. Even if they can, it is a reversal of a usual rebate scheme whereby one claims the rebate but pays only the minimum amount. One does not pay the full amount and then claim it back, which will apparently happen in this case.

Let us take the example of a young unemployed person resident in Castlemilk or in another housing scheme in Scotland, who is registered there for the poll tax and liable to pay 20 per cent. He goes to look for work elsewhere, stays in a hostel and has to pay the full daily rate of the community charge in that hostel. What arrangements are there for him to claim that back? Are there any?

Thirdly, what compensation do the Government intend to give to charitable bodies that run hostels and refuges if they fail to collect the full amount of poll tax from their clients, which will almost certainly be the case? They will still have to pay the local authority the sum that the local authority has agreed with them. The hostels face increased administrative costs anyway as a result of this tax, without also facing a loss of income, which would be better used carrying out their real work.

Fourthly, at the other end of the scale, how will the Government ensure that unscrupulous private landlords do not artificially keep their bed usage figures low in order to make a profit from those who stay in their properties?

Perhaps the truth is that the civil servants and the registration officers have made up their minds that there will be few collective community charge places. In fact, the only one may turn out to be the women's refuges, which are to be exempt in England and Wales.

The word from registration officers and Scottish Office officials is that they are so alarmed by the implications of this absurd tax that the registration officers are being advised not to place properties on the register but simply to put them either into the commercial rating system or to ensure that everybody is registered.

If that is true, would it not be more honest for the Government to introduce amendments into the English Bill, even at this late stage, to abolish the collective community charge altogether? It is an unfair, unworkable tax. Many poor people will pay the tax twice and may have to try to claim it back.

The regulations are part and parcel of the administrative nightmare that the Government are creating with the poll tax. We have seen examples of that already in Scotland with the registration process that has already begun. We want the Government not only to withdraw this part of the taxation but the whole tax. The Scottish people do not want it. They never have. They voted against it and the Government should withdraw and repeal the legislation.

10.41 pm

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) has used the opportunity of the debate to make a number of fairly general points. Because time is limited, I do not propose to follow several of his points. He represents at least one faction in the Labour party on this issue—those who wish the law to be obeyed. That is the position of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and it was the position of the Leader of the Opposition when he came to Scotland and made that most excellent 50-minute speech in which he did not mention devolution once. In passing, I would also add that he notably failed to congratulate the famous 50 on their victory in the last election.

However, the House will be anxious to hear from Opposition Members who take a different point of view, such as the hon. Members for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) and for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), who is in some danger of being accused of being a moderate these days, and the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown), who may come in to make a contribution.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the latest opinion poll in Scotland showed that 20 per cent. of Conservative voters favour a campaign of non-payment? Is that a faction within the Conservative party?

Mr. Stewart: I do not want to speak for too long in answering that point. My clear impression is that there is on the ground in Scotland a massive campaign of disinformation, which, in part, is unquestionably successful, and successful in some areas of my constituency. But when I meet people in Eastwood and explain the position in detail, people generally go away much more supportive of the community charge. However, as I understand it, the hon. Gentleman's position on the community charge, and that of the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), is clear. Gordon Wilson is clearly on the record as saying that they will not pay the community charge.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that Angus district council, which is administered by the Scottish National party, has not followed the advice or the example of the SNP leadership, including those in this House, and it is urging people to comply with the community charge, which it is putting into operation?

Mr. Stewart: That shows that Angus district council, in this if not always in other matters, is following a common-sense course.

I understand the Labour party's position, as expressed by the hon. Member for Cathcart, to be that if there is to be a community charge it should not be a standard community charge. *[Interruption.]* I have obviously misunderstood the hon. Member; he believes that there should be a standard community charge. I hope that local authorities will implement the multiplier with flexibility and will bear in mind in particular the needs of the tourist industry. The hon. Member for Cathcart will recall that on Report I referred to the size of the multiplier and that he disagreed with my view that it should not be as high as two, but I think he agreed that local authorities should be encouraged to implement it with flexibility.

Paragraphs (b) and (c) of regulation 3 are fairly clear about the closing order and the demolition order, but I

[Mr. Stewart]

hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will confirm that paragraph (a) deals with dangerous buildings and the making of an order by a local authority. I hope that he will explain what will happen when orders are revoked or when undertakings are given by the owners of the property that lead to suspension orders. There are three redundant words in paragraph (e). If a building is incapable of being lived in, by definition it is not being lived in.

I welcome the Government's general line in regulation 4 concerning refuges for spouses who have had to leave the marital home because of physical violence or because of the threat of such violence. Also, I welcome the fact that the names of people in that position will not be made publicly available. It is not proposed, either, that the collective community charge multiplier for such hostels should be made available to the public. These provisions should have the support of the whole House.

As for regulation 5, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will explain how paragraphs (a), (b) and (c) will work. I presume that paragraphs (b) and (c) would work through the collective community charge record that the owner of the property will be under an obligation to maintain, but that record will not show the information that is required under paragraph (a) concerning

"the maximum number of persons for whom the premises are capable of providing residential accommodation."

I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to clarify that matter.

I welcome the regulations. Despite the Opposition's programme of disinformation, they confirm that the procedures for implementing the abolition of domestic rates in Scotland are steadily on course.

10.49 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): The hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) seemed to be having difficulty in understanding the terms of regulation 5, or, alternatively, in reading the joined up writing of his brief, which clearly had been handed to him from the Government Benches in order to pad out this debate.

I should like briefly to speak about regulation 5, because it concerns a major problem, particularly in Edinburgh and Glasgow—the problem of houses in multiple occupation. Section 11 of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act gives the registration officer power to designate premises where the community charge will be paid. Most of those premises are in places where a large number of people, particularly young people, live. They are characterised by an itinerant population of people who are forced to move after a short time, either because of harassment by the landlord or, alternatively, because of the Government's social security regulations.

When we look at the terms of regulation 5 and the factors that the registration officer has to consider, anyone who knows anything about houses in multiple occupation will immediately realise that a formidable difficulty faces the registration officer. Under regulation 5(a), he has to discover

"the maximum number of persons for whom the premises are capable of providing residential accommodation".

Here is an immediate difficulty, because he will probably find that the number of people living in those premises far exceeds the capacity of the building. It is not uncommon to go into a room in which one person could decently sleep and find four or five beds. Indeed, it has been found that there is a sort of Box and Cox arrangement, with different people staying at different times during the day and night. That shows the desperation of many young people who have to find accommodation. How will the registration officer find out how many people the premises are capable of providing for?

Under regulation 5(b), the registration officer has to find out the number of people who have stayed there at any time during the past three months. From my experience of canvassing houses in multiple occupation, I can tell the registration officer that no one knows exactly how many people stay there. The people who stay there do not know who is expected from night to night. The landlord is most reticent as to how many people stay there. Indeed, a number of cases—and there will be more—coming before the courts in Scotland concerning fraud turn precisely on the question of how many people are supposed to be staying in the premises at any one time. The fact is that the registration officer will not be able to find the number concerned, because the information is not readily available.

If one adds to the difficulty of determining for how long someone has stayed in those premises, to calculate the daily basis on which the community charge is payable, the difficulty of calculating rebate, one sees that this regulation alone will add to the bureaucratic nightmare and the considerable expense that will be incurred in order to operate this ridiculous Act.

Ironically some good could come to Scotland from these regulations if the Government would accept the demands of Glasgow and Edinburgh district councils for the power to police such premises and, perhaps, get rid of the exploitation and hardship being endured by some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Time and again the Government have turned their back on reasonable requests that would allow the districts to look at fire regulations, the accommodation available and decent standards of health and hygiene. The fact is that the Government are quite happy to turn a blind eye to the activities of some of the most disreputable people in Scotland. That is deregulation; that is free enterprise at its best—let these people practise their Rachmanite tendencies on the most vulnerable in society.

I believe that if the Government would give councils the powers that they so desperately need, many of the problems in city centres, such as Edinburgh and Glasgow, could begin to be tackled. That is the only good thing that could come out of the regulations. If that is not done, regulation 5 will not work. The registration officer will have no more luck than the environmental health officer, the fire officer or anybody else who has tried to tackle the activities of landlords in these cities.

I hope that the Minister will pay attention to what has been said. It is not just hon. Members sitting on these Benches who have said it, but respectable people—even Government supporters in my constituency—*[Interruption.]* I was giving the Government a chance to salvage themselves. Many people living in the city centres of both Edinburgh and Glasgow would like the Government to take firm action to regulate these properties and to make the regulations work. Sadly, in this regulation, just as with everything else to do with the poll tax, the Government will be found wanting.

10.54 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) because, if I recollect exactly, before he got involved in a description of his hon. Friends which they found amusing, he was saying that the community charge, as referred to in these regulations—especially the collective community charge multiplier and the describing factors that appear in regulation 5—is unworkable.

However, I believe that there are positive advantages in the regulation. One is the fact that some sort of order and discipline will be brought into a situation in which, if I understood the hon. Gentleman's description correctly, there is multiple occupancy on a scale that is totally unacceptable. I accept that the hon. Gentleman knows much more about that than I do, because I do not fully understand it.

Mr. Darling: Yes, that is correct.

Mr. Walker: I think that that is a fair summing-up of what the hon. Gentleman said.

That being so, one of the ways of bringing about change is to hit people through their pockets, which is exactly what this will do.

If one accepts that the regulations are partly intended to ensure, first, that the landlord pays for the numbers, and, secondly, that those people who are occupying the premises on a transient multiple basis will be charged by the landlord, if the landlords are the Rachmans that the hon. Gentleman is claiming, the one thing that is absolutely certain is that they will make the charge. I do not think that any of us have any doubt about that. Once they have made the charge, the important thing will be how it is collected.

I do not deny that there will be some administrative difficulties and problems. However, the same is true of all taxes because people often try to avoid making their payments. That is true of value added tax. It is equally true that the community charge will involve self-declaration, as is often the case with value added tax. That tax also involves keeping records. If one does not keep records, one can find oneself in great trouble and difficulty. That will also be true in this case.

I turn to another matter that was raised earlier. I do not wish to make any comment on the Queen's country residence in Scotland, which is just north of my constituency. However, I remind the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) that staff in a second home, whether Balmoral or anywhere else, will pay the community charge. Many of those large homes have substantial staffs, all of whom will pay the community charge. Therefore, it is not quite true to say that people living in such homes will not be making their contribution or paying their share because they will be. Those who are living there will pay it—*[Interruption.]* I did not wish to make comments about the monarch. The hon. Member for Cathcart did that—I did not. I merely commented that people living in the second homes—the staff working there—will pay the community charge. Therefore, there is no question of those large homes not making their contribution to local finances.

I turn now to another matter that affects us in rural areas. Quite properly, holiday homes and second homes should make their contribution. That is what one would expect them to do. My constituency has many holiday and second homes and they should contribute to the expenses and costs, which they will be required to do under the regulations because, however one looks at it, anybody using a holiday home makes use of the police and the roads and is glad that the fire services are available. In my experience, all such people make use of the leisure and recreation facilities. The libraries are well used, as are water and sewerage facilities.

When hon. Members read *Hansard* tomorrow, they will realise that the hon. Member for Cathcart was spreading disinformation throughout his remarks. He kept making reference to a poll tax. There is no such thing. It does not exist. People are beginning to think that there are two different taxes—a community charge and, in addition, a poll tax. That is not surprising because Opposition Members have set out on a deliberate policy of disinformation. The more the community charge is investigated, and the more people refer to the fine booklet which has been distributed throughout Scotland, the more they realise just what the community charge means. That booklet explains fully and clearly what the community charge is and how it affects second homes.

At public meetings in my constituency it has been most interesting—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members seem to think that it is funny that people in Tayside, North, particularly in Pitlochry, should now accept that the community charge is a much fairer way of paying for local government. They accept that a contribution of 14p in the pound to local government expenditure is not draconian. Indeed, it is not any of the things which it had been called in the disinformation. It is a bargain when we consider the services that are provided. *[Interruption.]* Possibly the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) has not realised what a difference there is between 14p and 25p. That is why we are finding in Scotland that the community charge is being accepted by many more people. On 5 May Opposition Members will get a shock when they see just how many people have understood what the community charge means and have showed their appreciation by their votes.

11.2 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I preface my comments by supporting strongly the remarks of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling). He hit upon an important point in relation to houses in multiple occupancy which requires urgent attention. It may be difficult to make substantial improvements in the position through the poll tax legislation. In Committee on the Housing (Scotland) Bill the Under-Secretary of State suggested that the Government may consider legislation at an early stage to deal with some of the problems. If the Minister could confirm that, I think it would go a long way to alleviating the anxiety which is felt on this side of the House and, I suspect, on the Government side too.

It will be difficult for the Government to argue the case for the regulations because they cut across the underlying principle of the community charge which in essence and concept is wrapped around the principle of the individual's ability to pay. The community charge has a personal nature. The standard and collective charges have nothing to do with personal involvement. Therefore, it is an awkward and far-reaching anomaly in the principle and concept of the legislation. It exposes an important flaw.

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

I want to concentrate on the practicalities of some of the proposals in the regulations. There are questions which have been substantially unanswered about the scope of definitions in the body of the regulations. There is much vagueness in the legal definition of such terms as "practicable" and "short periods" which are in the main sections of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987 which has spawned the regulations. The vagueness will lead to much inconsistency in the application of the regulations.

If a wide degree of discretion is left to registration officers, it will lead to a wide degree of implementation. In turn, that will lead to a wide degree of reference to the courts to appeal against the designation that has been nominated by the registration officer. That is not in anyone's interests and I invite the Minister to comment.

There are substantial unanswered questions about how the multiplier is to be implemented. The factors to be taken into account in these orders are substantially inadequate to get any degree of certainty whatever into the formula that is to be used to calculate the multiplier as it affects the collective community charge.

The extent of the collective community charge remains somewhat in question. If my briefing is right, in Committee the Minister said:

"there must be a strong presumption in favour of individual registration"—[*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee*, 29 January 1987; c. 721.]

That is, as opposed to standard or collective registration. Paragraph 7 of the consultation paper states:

"It is, however, envisaged that personal community charge registration should be the norm in all cases where it is practicable."

I should like to know whether that remains the case and whether the standard and collective charges will be the substantial exception rather than the rule. If so, will the Minister answer one or two brief questions?

The Department must have done some investigation and research into how the collective community charge will work. How many premises in Scotland will be affected? How many individuals will be affected? What is the sum expected to be collected through the collective community charge? If it is to be the exception rather than the rule, I expect the answers to those questions to be minimal. If so, they may not be worth having. If the Minister takes into account the sum required to set up a proper appeal procedure and considers how landlords will be expected to pay the arrears of residents who abscond without paying, what proportion of the collective community charge contribution do the Government expect not to collect? Those are important questions and we need answers to them.

Some of the questions involve substantial implications for the civil liberties of a vulnerable group of people who may be subject to the collective charge, and that must be addressed. By definition, such people come from vulnerable and fragile social circumstances. As soon as they go through the front door of a residential establishment which is subject to the collective community charge they will be faced with a series of intricate, far-reaching and intrusive questions. That must be borne in mind.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) drew attention to some amendments made to the English Bill, particularly regarding the 5 per cent. maintenance fee, which have a substantial bearing on this debate. It is not right to say that the amendments being considered in another form on the Local Government Finance Bill are not impinging on our debate this evening.

These are important regulations. They do not clarify very much for me, as a lawyer. They are suffused with vagueness and raise many questions about the practicability of the collection of the charge. They are unworkable and unjust, and flow from an Act which is unfair and unwanted.

11.8 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): The Labour party should bear in mind that it stands massively discredited in the view of the Scottish people through its campaign of mass misinformation. The Scottish people do not like being hoodwinked and this will bounce back markedly in a few weeks' time.

I have in my hand the Scottish Local Government Information Unit bulletin, from which one notices that the editorial team comprises such people as Jean MacFadden, David Sanderson, Mark Lazarowicz, Steven Norris and other well-known Socialists. One would therefore take it that the information given in that bulletin about the community charge is hardly likely to be favourable to the Conservative party. Therefore, I quote from it with a degree of confidence, in view of the figures that it contains.

It states that in Dumfries and Galloway, for instance, the community charge would, if levied this year, be £210. Has the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) left the Chamber? No, I now see him, writing his *Hansard* notes. The figure for Roxburgh would be £211. Yet candidates from the Opposition party are going round quoting figures double that as being what the community charge is likely to be. They give out massive misinformation, and they also fail to indicate that rates will cease to be payable when the community charge comes into force.

Opposition Members must have pretty ghastly consciences about what they have been telling the people of Scotland concerning the practical impact of the community charge in due course. It is disgraceful that Labour candidates in Niths—[HON. MEMBERS: "Order!"] —are saying that the community charge——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. There is no vacancy here.

Sir Hector Monro: Opposition Members who support their candidates in those statements are a disgrace to politics generally in Scotland.

I believe that what is proposed by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office in the regulations before the House tonight is a move in the right direction in clarifying local government in respect of the change to the community charge system. When he has had an opportunity to speak tonight and to clarify points that have been raised on both sides of the House, he will be able to show that the Act was correct in both its policy and in its detail. I support it.

11.12 pm

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) excelled himself with his contribution tonight. He almost achieved that for which he

has been striving throughout this parliamentary Session —he almost cleared the Strangers' Gallery, with the exception of one slumbering person there.

The best that can be said of the three contributions from the Government Benches tonight is that none of them was worse than the contribution of the Secretary of State for the Environment yesterday. They were slightly better, possibly because all of them were patently from the same set of notes. All we heard tonight was one comment about misinformation, and nothing whatsoever about the regulations before the House.

It was also patently obvious from those contributions that Government Members have learned nothing from three months of debate. Everyone else in this Chamber and outside it—particularly in Scotland—knows that we are here dealing with a personal poll tax, a regressive tax, and a tax that in no way relates to ability to pay. It is also a tax that presents an administrative nightmare.

If the personal poll tax is already massively unpopular in Scotland, the regulations with which we are dealing concerning the collective community charge take matters to total absurdity. Those regulations emphasise the nightmare that will face not only the Government and the bureaucrats who will have to administer the charge but the people who will have to pay it.

One provision in the regulations illustrates the poll tax taken to its ultimate absurdity. As we heard earlier, it is to apply to those who frequently have to move about and occasionally to those who have no fixed abode. The results of the regulations laid tonight will be overpayment of tax by individuals, under-entitlement to rebates to individuals, and carte blanche to landlords for overcharging in cases of multiple occupancy. It is nothing more than carte blanche for fiscal Rachmanism. We expect the Minister to tell us whether he will encourage Glasgow and Edinburgh in the policing of multiple occupancy and how he will ensure that any of the charges collected by landlords under the regulations will be fully paid. What is to stop individual landlords lowering bed usage in their declarations and withholding charges from the Exchequer?

The regulations will be an administrative nightmare. It was ironic yesterday when the Secretary of State for the Environment told us that it would not be possible to alleviate the problems of the lower paid by means of the poll tax because of the bureaucratic apparatus that would have to be set up. The Government can set up a bureaucratic apparatus to investigate DHSS fraud and social security claimants, they can set up a vast apparatus to administer the regulations that are before us, but it seems that it is not possible to produce an apparatus to encompass the scheme that was urged upon the Government by certain Conservative Members last night.

There are four brief reasons why the regulations should be rejected. First, they rely almost entirely on the discretion of registration officers, and experience suggests that they will not be successful. Secondly, we come to the multiplier and the inadequacy of the factors that are to be taken into consideration when setting it. Seasonal variations and occupancy should be taken into account. Thirdly, the collective community charge is unwieldy and shows the poll tax in its most anachronistic form. Fourthly, a host of important questions remain unanswered. Not least of those questions is that concerning women who face domestic violence, who have been left within the terms of the collective community charge in Scotland. It seems that such women have been exempted from the charge under the English legislation.

The poll tax as it stands is a burden and an injury to the Scottish people. It is an unfair tax that is being imposed on an unwilling people in an undemocratic fashion by an uncaring Government. The regulations add insult to injury and the Government would be best advised to save their face, our time and much trouble and misery in Scotland by abandoning them.

11.18 pm

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): One of the minefields of the legislation that we are discussing is that of homes in multiple occupation, and I regret that time does not permit me to pursue it. Nor can I investigate those remarkable claims of support for the legislation. I understand that the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) can in his constituency find pockets of support for the poll tax, while I assume that the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) holds his public meetings in Brigadoon. But opinion poll statistics tell us that 80 per cent. of people in Scotland oppose the poll tax and will continue to do so ever more deeply and ever more strongly. I intend to deal only with the standard community charge.

I understand that there were once some Tory votes in Millport. I have some statistics about the impact of the standard community charge on that community. They reflect—even in the context of second homes—the fact that the charge takes no account of ability to pay. Once again that is the fatal flaw. There are 1,300 properties in Millport and 60 per cent. of them are occupied throughout the year. The other 40 per cent. are second homes. However, the popular second-home image is irrelevant to Millport. Second homes need not be bijou country residences. They can be tiny homes that may have no basic amenities and no inside toilets.

Under the legislation, the owners of these second homes will be liable to pay twice the community charge. In cash terms that means that, on an island with a population of 1,300 with 1,300 properties, the Government will take an extra £250,000 a year out of the island of Cumbrae and the town of Millport.

Mr. Allan Stewart *rose*——

Mr. Wilson: I know of the distinction offered between one and two times the personal charge but, given everything else to do with the legislation, who would expect a local authority to set the lower charge? The Government supported by the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) have not even allowed the possibility of setting it lower than one personal community charge in the Scottish legislation, unlike its English counterpart.

So, with this legislation, the Tory Government will take an extra £250,000 out of a seaside town that needs assistance, support and rehabilitation, not this penal fine. I understand the logic of what the Government are doing. It would not make sense, even by their standards, to say that people who own second homes without inside toilets or any of the amenities we would expect in our own homes should be exempted from the poll tax. How could they say that about second homes when they are not prepared to say it about first homes? Logically, how can they give relief to people who spend two weeks a year in such homes when they tell people who live for 52 weeks of the year in the

[Mr. Wilson]

most primitive conditions that they must pay the same poll tax as the people who live in the most prosperous, biggest mansions on the hill? In a perverse sort of way, I suppose, we should praise the Government for not allowing that sort of illogicality.

However, by extending the principle of ignoring ability to pay for second homes as well as first ones, the penalty that will be imposed on Millport will be £250,000, which it can ill afford.

I conclude with an anecdote from a phone-in radio programme in which I recently took part with the ex-hon. Member for Argyll and Bute, Mr. John J. MacKay, now exalted to even greater heights while he awaits the departure of the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro)——

Sir Hector Monro: He will have to wait a long time.

Mr. Wilson: I hope that *Hansard* caught that. The hon. Member for Dumfries said that Mr. MacKay would have a long wait; on a historical note, he had a long wait in Argyll as well.

A blind man from Strachur phoned in and asked whether he would have to pay the iniquitous tax. Mr. MacKay, adopting the caring voice of Thatcherism, said that he was afraid that he would. The blind man said that he lived in a little house and had to move to another little house in winter, and asked whether he would still have to pay it. The answer again was yes. When he asked whether he would have to pay two poll taxes, the answer from caring Mr. MacKay was again yes. At that point I intervened to ask whether the blind man on the other end of the line would actually have to pay three poll taxes. Mr. MacKay had to agree that he would. That blind man has to divide his time between two tiny homes in Strachur and, despite having a minimal income, will have to pay three poll taxes so that the Duke of Argyll can save £5,000, £10,000 or £15,000 a year, like all the other Tory grandees who are the beneficiaries of this shameless handout.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know of your deep concern for the protection of Back-Bench Members, and it cannot have escaped your notice that my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), who has tried to put forward the Scottish National party's view on the regulations, has once again been excluded from doing so.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I understand the frustration of the hon. Lady and her party. I only wish I could have called every hon. Member who wishes to speak in this debate.

11.19 pm

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Ian Lang): I think we know the policy of the Scottish National party on the community charge: it is to urge the people of Scotland to break the law. We want no part of that sort of policy in the House.

This has been an interesting, useful and constructive debate. As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) said, this is not the most controversial part of the community charge. This short set of regulations contains only three substantive provisions. I shall refer briefly to each in turn; and, in doing so, I shall try to deal with as many of the points raised during the debate as I can.

Regulation 3 prescribes certain classes of premises—briefly, uninhabitable property—that are not to be liable for the standard community charge. The standard community charge is payable in respect of dwelling houses where there is no one who is solely or mainly resident. That is, holiday homes and similar property. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) asked whether it is worth it. The answer to that is yes. Because with the abolition of domestic rates, no payment would need to be made for the local services that are provided for property of this kind if something like the standard community charge was not provided for. That would clearly not be right, since property-based services—fire services, street lighting, and so on—are provided in respect of these dwelling houses as they are provided in respect of other dwelling houses. In addition, owners and tenants of the property may use personal local services while they are actually resident in the property.

The Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987 therefore provides for a simple system whereby property of this kind gives rise to liability for a standard community charge, to be set at between one and two units of the personal community charge for the area.

Mr. Maxton: It is a property tax.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Member for Cathcart says that it is a property tax and in his speech he said that it was an absurdity. The liability is on the owner of the property for the benefit that he as an individual has from the local services that are available. It is not a tax that is variable according to the circumstances of different types of property. The person liable to pay the charge is the owner or long-term tenant of the property. Local authorities will have discretion as to the level of standard community charge in each area.

We expect that it will produce a broadly similar level of revenue as domestic rates produce on these premises at present. During the passage of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Bill it was recognised that uninhabitable property should not be subject to the standard community charge. Regulation 3, therefore, fulfils the undertakings that were given on this point during the passage of the Bill.

Where property is clearly ruinous, we expect that it will be categorised by the assessor not as a dwelling house but under some other description—such as "premises" or "store"—and will thus remain in rating, with no question of standard community charge liability arising. Dwelling houses in respect of which closing or demolition orders have been served or which, though not subject to such an order, are incapable of being lived in because they are under reconstruction, would give rise to standard community charge liability, if they were not prescribed as being exempt. Regulation 3, therefore, provides for this prescription.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) queried Regulation 3(a). This refers to the demolition of dangerous property. He asked what would happen if the demolition order were to be revoked. In the relatively rare event of that taking place, the property owner would resume liability for the standard community

charge. If it became inhabited as a sole or main residence, the resident would be liable for the personal community charge.

Regulations 4 and 5 relate to the collective community charge, which will be applied, in place of personal community charge liability, in respect of premises whose residents are so transient that it would not be practicable for registration officers to register them individually for the personal community charge, and for local authorities to collect personal community charges from them. There has been much criticism of the collective community charge mechanism, and indeed it is our firm intention that it should be used only in a very small number of cases. That answers the point made by a number of hon. Members. But no one has denied that a small number of such cases will exist, and that therefore something along the lines of the collective community charge is necessary.

Regulation 4 provides for the one use of the collective community charge that does not relate directly to the transience of the residents. It ensures that women's refuges will, in all cases, give rise to collective community charge liability.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) *rose—*

Mr. Lang: I am sorry, but I shall not give way because I am on an important point.

This provision will ensure that the names of women staying in refuges will not appear on the community charges register, and the concomitant provision in regulation 15 of the Community Charges (Registration) (Scotland) Regulations 1988, which we debated on 28 March, ensures that the collective community charge multiplier, which will normally identify on the public register premises liable to the collective community charge, will not appear on the public register in the case of women's refuges. It will thus be impossible to distinguish from the public register women's refuges from any other address. These two provisions were brought forward after careful consideration, during the passage of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Bill, of the position of women in refuges and the need for their anonymity to be preserved. I am confident that the mechanism that we propose will achieve that on a consistent basis throughout Scotland.

The hon. Member for Cathcart asked about the English situation. I accept that it would be possible to deal with the position of women in refuges along these lines rather than through the mechanism provided in regulation 4. That procedure is indeed envisaged for England and Wales. The mechanism that I have described was formulated after careful consideration of the views put forward, including the views of Scottish Women's Aid, during the passage of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Bill. It provides a standard mechanism for all women's refuges throughout Scotland to which Scottish Women's Aid attaches considerable importance.

I would therefore be reluctant to replace that mechanism with a general provision for anonymous registration, which would depend on women resident in refuges making individual applications to the community charges registration officer for their names to be removed from the public form of the register.

The hon. Member for Cathcart also asked me about rebates from collective community charge contributions. We have always made it clear that those who pay collective community charge contributions, like those who pay the personal community charge, should be eligible for——

It being half-past Eleven o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Prayers against statutory instruments &c. (negative procedure)).*

The House proceeded to a Division—

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton) *[seated and covered]:* On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I urge you to reconsider the question of locking the doors? I suggest, with respect, that they were locked two minutes too soon.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I can help the hon. Member. There is something wrong with the digital clock. I shall allow another two minutes.

The House having divided: Ayes 164, Noes 277.

Division No. 266] **[11.30 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Harman, Ms Harriet
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun

Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Robert N. Wareing.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hind, Kenneth
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary

Ward, John	Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*	Winterton, Nicholas
Warren, Kenneth	Wolfson, Mark
Watts, John	Wood, Timothy
Wells, Bowen	Woodcock, Mike
Wheeler, John	Yeo, Tim
Whitney, Ray	Younger, Rt Hon George
Widdecombe, Ann	
Wiggin, Jerry	Tellers for the Noes:
Wilkinson, John	Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Wilshire, David	Mr. David Maclean.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have just been watching the Division, and I was interested to see that at least 13 Tory Members who voted against the principle of an unfair poll tax for England and Wales yesterday were cheerfully voting in favour of the same principle for Scotland. That number included the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates). Where does that leave the principle of fairness in the United Kingdom?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order, and no breach of order has been committed, and the hon. Gentleman knows that.

PETITION

Rating Reform

11.42 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I beg leave to present a petition from many of my constituents. It shows that if the poll tax Bill is enacted it will impose unfair financial burdens on many households, penalise those providing a home for adult children or elderly relatives, and necessitate excessive intrusion into the lives of ordinary citizens in connection with the compilation of the register.

The proposed tax is grossly unfair, favours the rich, and is unrelated to the ability to pay. The Tory party will reap a bitter harvest when it calls the next general election.

The petitioners pray that the House will vote against this iniquitous and immoral measure.

To lie upon the Table.

North-East Lancashire Enterprise Zone

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

11.43 pm

Mr. Ken Hargreaves (Hyndburn): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise the subject of the future of the north-east Lancashire enterprise zone. I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee) and the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike). I welcome the support for the application to extend the zone that was given by my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle who, from the outset, has been an enthusiastic supporter of the concept of enterprise zones, and who has taken a deep and continuing interest in the north-east Lancashire zone. I also welcome the support of the hon. Member for Burnley, who has worked extremely hard in pressing for the zone to be extended.

The north-east Lancashire enterprise zone is one of the second round enterprise zones and was designated in December 1983. It consists of a total of seven sites in the boroughs of Hyndburn, Rossendale, Pendle and Burnley, with a total of 282 acres.

When the idea of enterprise zones was first suggested by the Government, there was much unfavourable comment nationally from the Labour and Liberal parties. They were a gimmick, we were told, and not a serious attempt to deal with unemployment. What was true nationally was true locally and the Labour party on Hyndburn council was certainly less than enthusiastic about our application for an enterprise zone.

How wrong Opposition parties have proved to be. I now welcome the all-party support for the north-east Lancashire enterprise zone. It has that support because of the obvious success that it has had in attracting new investment to the area. The enterprise zone's financial incentives have triggered off a new, substantial burst of development activity.

A survey of firms in Hyndburn's enterprise zone in 1987 revealed that the majority of firms regarded the financial incentives and the available capital taxation allowances as being important to their location decision. The high level of investment has created a large number of new jobs—almost 500 in Hyndburn alone. These are permanent new jobs. A high proportion of these jobs has been taken up by local people. There has also been direct employment in the various development projects in the zone.

All of this has played an important part in reducing unemployment in the borough and in the area. I welcome the reduction of unemployment in Hyndburn, and in north-east Lancashire generally, over the past 18 months. I acknowledge the part that the enterprise zone has played in that. I congratulate the Government on introducing the concept of enterprise zones. They were right, and their critics were wrong. My request to the Government is that they will now listen to local opinion, despite the decision in December that a general extension of the enterprise zone experiment is not desirable.

That the Government do listen can be seen clearly from yesterday's announcement that the Blackburn southern bypass will be designed as a dual lane motorway, even though it will cost £9 million more than the scheme for a trunk road. The Government listened to our pleas on that issue and they gave us what we asked for. I hope that they will listen tonight and react equally sympathetically to the local views on our enterprise zone.

We believe that the enterprise zone is one of the best and most effective ways of tackling the economic problems of the area. We face in north-east Lancashire a particularly localised set of economic problems. Despite improvements made in the 1980s, there is still a lack of modern industrial floor space. The older industrial stock is strongly associated with textiles and consists of multi-storey spinning mills and single-storey northlight weaving sheds.

As the cotton industry has declined, many mills have been sub-divided. They are often in poor condition and unsuited to modern industrial methods, and situated on cramped and inadequate sites. Difficulties with internal layout, as well as access and loading, all serve to restrict efficient functioning and growth potential.

In Hyndburn, 72 per cent. of industrial premises were not purpose-built; some 64 per cent. of them were built before 1914. The extension of the enterprise zone will continue to provide modern and purpose-built premises and help to alleviate the problem of inadequate accommodation. That is still faced by a large sector of industry in north-east Lancashire.

There is a continuing need for a steady flow of investment into north-east Lancashire if we are to tackle our economic difficulties. There is an inadequate amount of suitable industrial land for potential users, but development depends ultimately on the initiative and energies of the private sector.

The rate of new development depends to a large extent on the financial returns generated. In north-east Lancashire, returns on investment are not as substantial as in the south-east, and the enterprise zone has been a major factor in persuading firms to set up in north-east Lancashire.

Most of the land in the zone has now been developed. That development has so far involved a substantial private sector capital investment and resulted in the creation of 1,501 new jobs, the third highest level of total employment amongst the second generation zones, and the second highest in the proportion of manufacturing jobs involved. Of the 115 companies in the enterprise zone, 38 are completely new start-ups and 20 have plans for future expansion.

The zone has been extremely cost-effective in the creation of new jobs. In Hyndburn, for example, the overall public sector cost of the enterprise zone, in terms of rate allowances and capital investment, has been in the region of £1·4 million, or £3,200 per job, and in terms of expenditure on infrastructure, £813,000, or £1,860 per job.

Those figures suggest that an extension of the enterprise zone would represent good value for money given that the estimated national cost per additional job created on designated zones is £8,500. Almost 40 per cent. of the land identified for inclusion in the proposed extension is immediately available for development. Designation as an enterprise zone would lead to a considerable amount of new development, thus making full use of the infrastructure provided in the past years. That would maximise the return on existing public investment, surely something that the Government support.

For all the reasons that I have outlined, I hope that the Government will look again at the decision not to create further enterprise zones. An extension of the enterprise zone really is the best way to help the economic recovery

in north-east Lancashire to continue. It is the one measure that helps Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle and Rossendale. All other measures do not.

Assisted area status benefits only Hyndburn and Rossendale, as does the derelict land grant rolling programme, not Burnley or Pendle. The urban programme and the inner-city programme benefit only Burnley, not Hyndburn, Pendle or Rossendale. We have all benefited from the enterprise zone, not least Pendle, which has made worthwhile progress as a result.

Like the Under-Secretary of State for Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle, who has worked so hard to deal with and help alleviate unemployment in Pendle, I believe that much of the momentum resulting from the enterprise zone will be lost unless we are allowed to extend it or further Government support is available in one form or another.

I urge the Minister to take account of the representations made to him, not least by Hyndburn, and I give him a friendly warning. Because of the massive 18 per cent. rate rise imposed by Lancashire county council, the Conservative party expects to gain control of Hyndburn in the local elections. That being so, I warn my hon. Friend that the new leader of the council, councillor Mrs. Betty Court, who is as determined, single-minded and persuasive as Mother Theresa and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister put together, will be on her way to see him, before the returning officer has recovered from announcing the result, to support the request that I have made, and it may on balance be wise to reconsider the matter tonight.

11.52 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): First, I want to thank the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) for allowing me to take part in the debate. This is an important matter to the people of north-east Lancashire. Like him, I appreciate the presence of the Under-Secretary of State for Employment, the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee), who has responsibility for tourism. I know that he has actively supported the case that we are debating. Indeed, I was fortunate to have three minutes at the end of the Consolidated Fund debate when I said that the case that I was making briefly at that time had the support of those two hon. Members.

It is also significant that the four authorities are united in the belief that one of the most important things for the economic recovery and regeneration of north-east Lancashire would be for the Government to agree an extension of the enterprise zone.

As the hon. Member for Hyndburn has said, we welcome yesterday's announcement that the M65 is to be linked by a road of motorway standard to the main national motorway network. The Minister could make it an extremely good week for north-east Lancashire tonight if he were able to say that the Government and his Department were prepared to reconsider this enterprise zone extension bid. Crowned with the Burnley football team reaching Wembley tonight, that would make it an extremely good week for the area.

Another factor should commend itself to the Government. The Government often talk of problems being tackled by local and national Government and the public sector working together. Conservative Members say that that is the way to solve many of the problems that face the country. Those three sectors have worked exceptionally well within the enterprise zone to make it a success. Its success should commend itself to the Government.

In *The Daily Telegraph* on 30 March of this year there was an article by Trevor Bates on Burnley and Pendle. It refers to three industrial estates in those boroughs that face similar problems, as do Hyndburn and Rossendale. It says:

> "The designation of three industrial estates as having enterprise zone status has been another significant factor in winning manufacturing and high-tech companies to the area, including a number from abroad."

In addition, Texas Eastern has set up a factory in Burnley that was recently opened by the chairman of the Conservative party. At the opening ceremony, the company made it very clear that one of the reasons for going to Burnley was the enterprise zone. Archie Thompson, the executive vice-president of Texas Eastern, has stressed the importance of communications in moving into the area.

Another company, Vekaplast, has also moved into the enterprise zone. Its managing director, Peter Abbott, has said that the existence of the enterprise zone and the available pool of good quality workers attracted the company to the area.

I refer also to a company in the Pendle constituency, Bodycare Toiletries, that recently moved to the Lomeshaye industrial estate. A letter I have received from Pamela Bishop of the Burnley and Pendle development association says:

> "The company conducted an exhaustive search for industrial premises stretching from North Wales to Carlisle. However, the Development Association managed to persuade them that Pendle and Lomeshaye Industrial Estate would be an ideal place for them."

That is in the enterprise zone, but that zone is nearly full. If we are to overcome the problems to which the hon. Member for Hyndburn referred and about which we could speak at great length, an extension of the enterprise zone is vital. It would represent good value for money. Therefore, the Government should accept the case that we are making.

11.57 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Colin Moynihan): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) on his success in the ballot and on the assiduous and effective way in which he presented his case. I am pleased to see that his hard work is supported by the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee). They will understand why I am replying to the debate, in view of the ministerial responsibilities of my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier) whose constituency also embraces the north-east Lancashire enterprise zone. It is of course not the first time that I have responded to a debate on this subject, as it was raised by the hon. Member for Burnley in the Consolidated Fund debate on 10 March, to which he has referred.

The enterprise zone experiment was one of the first steps the Government took in 1979 towards lifting burdens on business and enterprise. They have led the way along the path of deregulation that has stimulated the entrepreneurship that has characterised our economic recovery. I am cheered by the evidence that enterprise

[Mr. Colin Moynihan]

zones have helped the regeneration of many localities which were widely believed to be beyond the point of no return in their economic fortunes. We know the commonly quoted examples—the Isle of Dogs, Corby, Hartlepool and Telford.

But, as the hon. Member for Hyndburn has reminded us, the north-east Lancashire zone has also been a success story. It was designated in December 1983 with a total area of 114 hectares spread over seven sites in the towns of Burnley, Accrington, Rossendale and Nelson. The sites were little developed. To those sites were given freedom from rates, 100 per cent. capital allowances to be set against tax, and a much simplified planning regime.

Today, those sites are no longer vacant. At the end of 1986—the latest date for which we have information—the Department's annual monitoring report, published last December, revealed 87 business establishments—a 135 per cent. increase since designation—occupying 106,000 sq m of floor space—a 158 per cent. increase—and offering 2,400 jobs, a staggering 224 per cent. increase.

All that has not happened without considerable effort. Hon. Members representing that area have been fully involved. My hon. Friend the Member for Pendle played a major role in ensuring the establishment of the enterprise zone. The fruits of his hard work are well known. As we all know, he is an assiduous Member, dedicated to the regeneration of north-east Lancashire and to the interests of his constituents.

The hon. Member for Burnley has brought me to the Dispatch Box before. While I may not always live up to the aspirations that he has for his constituents, it will not be for want of recognising his commitment. In passing, I congratulate Burnley on reaching Wembley this evening.

The substantial contribution of my hon. Friend for Rossendale and Darwen also cannot go unmentioned. His ministerial position, similar to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle, constrains him from addressing the House this evening. However, there are few hon. Members of whom it could be equally appropriately said that his actions on behalf of his constituents speak louder than words. He deserves the congratulations of this House for his commitment to economic growth and progress in north-east Lancashire.

In addition to those hon. Members and my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn, the local business community and the local authorities have also been united in their active support for the zone. The local authorities—both as planning authorities and sometimes as landowners—have been positive in their promotion and management of the zone. The success of the zone—in terms of new private investment, new work space to diversify what is locally available, new jobs of which many have been taken by local people—is largely to their credit.

However, such success means that the zone will soon be fully developed. And, as my hon. Friend has said, notwithstanding the growth within the zone and the impact that it has made on the area, it has not, and indeed never could, in itself overcome entirely north-east Lancashire's economic problems. Therefore, it was natural that the question of an extension to the zone should be raised. The success of so many of the enterprise zones has led other localities to exactly the same point of wanting to extend existing zones or establish new ones. At the end of 1987, some 26 such applications were to hand for England alone.

As I explained at the start, enterprise zones were established as an experiment in deregulation. In 1986, we decided that it was timely to review their progress and decide whether, and on what terms, to continue the experiment. To assist us in that task, we commissioned an evaluation by consultants of the performance, having regard both to costs and effectiveness, of the existing zones. Their work explored fully such questions as whether investment, construction and employment on the zones was additional to what might have happened in the locality in the absence of the zone, what effects—both positive and negative—the zones were having on their surrounding areas, and what level of public cost was attached to the new jobs. With the benefit of their analysis, we reviewed the zone experiment and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made a statement of policy to this House on 17 December last. We published the report by the consultants.

The essence of my right hon. Friend's statement was that there would be no general extension of the enterprise zone experiment. The zones had been successful in varying degrees in regenerating areas which had hitherto been in steady decline. However, those achievements must be set against the cost to the public purse, which totalled just under £300 million up to the end of 1986. There was now a variety of measures to stimulate development in areas adversely affected by changes in the local economy, which will often be more cost effective than an enterprise zone. Nevertheless, there will still be exceptional circumstances that could justify a new enterprise zone or the extension of an existing zone, including the nature and severity of the local economic problem, the likely cost-effectiveness of an enterprise zone in contributing to its solution, in particular in comparison with other measures available, and the capacity of the authorities and agencies concerned to ensure a zone's success.

Against those new, severer tests, we examined all the outstanding bids for new zones and extensions and found them wanting. All were therefore rejected at the time of the policy statement. There were also the tests applied to the proposal from north-east Lancashire which was submitted in February, subsequent to the new policy statement. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State concluded that that proposal should likewise be rejected.

Given the experience of the first five years of the existing zone, there could be no doubt about the capacity and competence of the zone authorities to make the zone a success. The evidence on that was quite clear. The decision turned more on the nature and severity of the economic problems of north-east Lancashire and the comparative cost-effectiveness of an enterprise zone extension in tackling them.

We must agree that the problems of north-east Lancashire are not as bad as those prevailing in many other areas which have faced industrial restructuring over the last decade. The economic circumstances of north-east Lancashire are just not exceptional enough to justify—in the terms of our stated policy—being answered by a further enterprise zone.

In assessing cost-effectiveness, we must consider both sides of the equation. The success and effectiveness of the existing north-east Lancashire zone is evident in what has been said tonight. However, although the zone may be

nearly full, the total cost of the measures will continue to grow. For example, the cost of the rates exemption for the zone was £400,000 in 1985-86, the figure that was taken into account by the consultants; in 1986-87, it had risen to £700,000 and last year exceeded £900,000. These payments have nearly five more years to run.

There is other assistance on offer to north-east Lancashire that is making a steady, and more cost-effective, contribution to economic recovery—measures which, I think, are too lightly dismissed by the north-east Lancashire enterprise zone authorities in their submission to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for an extension to the enterprise zone.

In 1986, Burnley became an urban authority invited to submit inner area programmes to my Department. The council had an allocation of £1 million for urban programme projects in 1987-88. That has been substantially increased this year to £1·8 million—an 80 per cent. increase and the largest in the country. Those resources enable the council to carry out a range of economic, environmental, social and housing projects to tackle its inner-city area problems.

Moreover, Burnley, as one of the 57 target areas, will have a chance to benefit from many of the dozen new initiatives announced in the "Action for Cities" paper launched by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 7 March. There is extensive spending on training, enterprise and employment schemes by the Department of Employment and the Manpower Services Commission, and local firms will be eligible for higher rates of grant under the Department of Trade and Industry's new enterprise initiative. Private developers in Burnley can apply to my Department for the new city grant which comes into operation on 2 May. The city grant will provide support to private sector capital projects for industrial, commercial and housing schemes which benefit rundown areas and which cannot proceed without grant aid.

The Department of Trade and Industry's new enterprise initiative, launched in January, brought together new and existing measures of support. Industry and commerce throughout north-east Lancashire may benefit from the marketing, design, quality, manufacturing, business planning and financial information systems initiatives. They provide a comprehensive range of consulting assistance in the key management functions.

Regional selective assistance is available to assist with the costs of investment projects undertaken by firms in the assisted areas, which include the Accrington and Rossendale travel-to-work areas.

The British Overseas Trade Board provides a wide range of help and guidance to assist firms and businesses with their exporting and overseas market activities.

The business education initiative seeks to promote clearer working links between industry and education at all levels—from schools to colleges, and universities. For example, the north-west's Regional Technology Centre, hosted by NIMTECH at St. Helens, will facilitate the exchange of technical expertise between industrial and academic centres of expertise within the region.

The research and technology initiative provides financial assistance, guidance and expertise to assist the development of new technologies, new processes and new services.

Simplified planning zones—SPZs—are another new Government initiative designed to quicken the pace of development in areas where it is most needed. They are modelled on the planning arrangements which have been successful in enterprise zones and offer the same scope for stimulating investment and regeneration by simple and positive planning. Those zones are particularly well-suited to the older urban areas where they can be used to bring rundown industrial land back into productive use. I hope that the local planning authorities in north-east Lancashire will be designating some SPZs.

The EEC also addresses the problems of this area. All four enterprise zone authorities are eligible to receive non-quota European regional development fund assistance. This aims to develop new economic activities in areas adversely affected by the restructuring of the textile and clothing industries.

Projects estimated to cost some £2·25 million are being considered for grant aid. A decision is expected in early June. In addition, Hyndburn and Rossendale are also eligible for ERDF quota assistance. Grant is generally 50 per cent. of the eligible costs of schemes which provide basic services or communications for existing and future industry and commerce. Again I would urge the authorities to take full advantage of these facilities.

The hon. Member and my hon. Friends will know that much has already been achieved in north-east Lancashire through the derelict land grant rolling programme in which Lancashire county council, Hyndburn borough council, and Rossendale borough council jointly participate. This programme has enabled the local authorities not only to restore derelict land to beneficial use, but to foster commercial and industrial development. A further £1 million of grant is promised for the area in 1988-89 on top of the £3 million spent in 1986-87 and 1987-88. In addition, a new DLG rolling programme covering the whole of the Leeds-Liverpool canal corridor has just been announced with a project spend of £750,000 in its first year.

All these measures and the substantial resources being provided by the Government present clear opportunities for both the public and private sectors to grasp to bring about growth and prosperity in this part of Lancashire.

There is a fundamental point here. Enterprise zones were, as I have reminded hon. Members, always intended as an experiment. Their benefits are also time limited to 10 years from designation. The hope was that a zone, if successful, would provide a stimulus to the local economy, not a continuing prop. There are now signs, in north-east Lancashire and elsewhere, of this effect. We must build on and exploit what the enterprise zone has done for the local economy to sustain its recovery.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 20 April 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

SCOTTISH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (OBAN SOUTH PIER) ORDER CONFIRMATION

Mr. Secretary Rifkind presented a Bill to confirm a Provisional Order under section 7 of the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, relating to the Scottish Development Agency (Oban South Pier): And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be considered upon Tuesday 26 April and to be printed. [Bill 145.]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Rating Reform

1. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has now received concerning his plans to introduce a flat-rate community charge in England and Wales.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): A summary of the 1,271 responses received by 31 October 1986, when the consultation period on the Green Paper ended, was placed in the Library on 15 December 1986. Since then my Department has received a large number of letters commenting on specific aspects of our proposals and requesting further information.

Mr. McAllion: In considering the representations, will the Secretary of State take time to reflect on his party's manifesto pledge that it would replace rates with a fairer system of local taxation? Will he also consider the constitutional reality that as he has been unable to convince even his own Back Benchers that the poll tax is a fairer replacement, the other place will be perfectly justified in amending his legislation so that it reflects, not the will of an embattled minority inside the Downing Street bunker, but the will of the real majority in England, Wales and Scotland, who are united in opposition to the unfairness of the tax?

Mr. Ridley: I remember the manifesto on which we fought the 1987 election as setting out clearly every aspect of our proposals for the community charge. I think the hon. Gentleman will find that that is true if he takes the trouble to examine it.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, in the second Division during the Report stage of the Local Government Finance Bill the Government had a majority of 133. That must be a signal that more hon. Members are in favour of the community charge proposals than it would seem from the Government's paper majority—if the hon. Gentleman takes the majority of 25 as meaning the opposite.

Mr. Squire: As the majority of the population will not be eligible for rebates, is it fair that the poorest should pay the same as the richest?

Mr. Ridley: We debated that matter on Monday. My hon. Friend knows full well that the poorest will not pay the same as the richest because of the very extensive and expanded system of rebates, which takes nine million people out of paying the full community charge.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Given the Secretary of State's comments on the radio yesterday about the role of the other place in this matter, and the subsequent revised advice that the other place can indeed consider both the flat rate community charge and other schemes, what representations does he expect to receive from the other place in the next three months?

Mr. Ridley: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has studied my comments on the other place, which were given not yesterday but the day before. I advised the other place that since the electorate elected a Government with a majority of 101 over all other parties on the basis of the proposals set out extremely clearly in the manifesto, I hoped that their Lordships would not feel inclined to change the principle of a matter which had been approved by the British electorate.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Has my right hon. Friend had an opportunity to reply to the Labour party's request for exemplification of its system of capital value rating and of local income tax as a means of financing local government?

Mr. Ridley: Yes. I have written to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) giving preliminary exemplification for the Labour party's proposal of a mixture of capital value rates and local income tax, on the basis of assumptions.

Mr. Rooker: The right hon. Gentleman's assumptions.

Mr. Ridley: I made those assumptions clear to the right hon. Gentleman. I asked him to tell me whether any of them were wrong and, if so, in which way the Opposition would seek to change them. I have yet to have even the courtesy of a reply from the right hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Cunningham: I have replied.

Mr. Ridley: I am talking about the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook. As soon as I have a reply from the right hon. Gentleman or the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), I shall send a complete analysis, putting right any errors in the ones that I have already sent.

Dr. Cunningham: How does the Secretary of State square his determination to plough ahead with the flat-rate poll tax with the responses given by his colleagues, the Home Secretary and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, in Westminster Abbey today to the questions from the Archbishop of Canterbury, launching the Church urban fund, when he asked:

"What is he sending us to do?"

The right hon. Gentleman's colleagues in the Cabinet replied:

"To share our wealth with those in our cities who are poor, powerless or disadvantaged, and to help them to build a new future for themselves and for us all."

How does the Secretary of State square that promise made by his colleagues today in the abbey with his determination to press ahead with the poll tax?

Mr. Ridley: By not imposing capital value rates and a local income tax on the people in whom the hon. Gentleman is interested.

Rates

2. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities have notified him of their intention not to increase their rates for 1988-89.

Mr. Ridley: Fifty-one.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Has my right hon. Friend noticed that Sedgemoor district council is not increasing its rate this year, whereas Liberal-controlled Somerset county council is increasing its rate by an unnecessary 12 per cent.? Does he agree that this contrast is partly disguised by having a single rate demand that adds together the two figures? Will he change the rules and insist on separate rate demands from separate local authorities? It might cost more in postage, but it would bring a big benefit in terms of accountability and public awareness.

Mr. Ridley: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. It is odd that freedom of information is Liberal policy except when it comes to telling the electorate by how much the rates have been increased. The answer to the problem will be the community charge. The new charge demand bill will set out extremely clearly the overspending or the underspending of the county and the overspending or the underspending of the district. Every charge payer will be in full possession of the information and will know why he has to pay too much, if he does.

Mr. Wilson: Would the Secretary of State care to calculate by how much the authorities in question would have had to increase their domestic poll tax if that system had been in effect when there was an interrelationship between the uniform business rate and the domestic sector of their income?

Mr. Ridley: I should not like to make that calculation on my feet, but if the community charge had been in place I bet that they would not have increased their spending by so much.

Mr. Devlin: How many of the authorities that my right hon. Friend has mentioned are controlled by one party, and what proportion of them are Conservative controlled?

Mr. Ridley: Of the 51 authorities to which I referred, 17 are Conservative and 28 are rate or precept-limited in one respect of another. The others are controlled by the odds and sods brigade.

Dr. Cunningham: As the Secretary of State and his hon. Friends are interested in rate increases this year, has he heard from the top 10 Tory district authorities in England with the highest rates? They are Gillingham, West Wiltshire, Melton, Suffolk Coastal, Wokingham, Dover, North Wiltshire, East Northampton, Havant and Stafford. All are Tory controlled, with rate rises of 42·3 per cent. in Gillingham, 41 per cent. in West Wiltshire, 41 per cent. in Melton, 39 per cent. in Suffolk Coastal, 29 per cent. in Wokingham, 29 per cent. in Shepway, the constituency of the Minister for Local Government, who is not here today, 26 per cent. in Dover, 25 per cent. in North Wiltshire, 24 per cent. in East Northampton, 21 per cent. in Havant and 21 per cent. in Stafford. For good measure, Tory Lincolnshire is up by 14 per cent., Tory Kent by 12·5 per cent. and Tory Surrey by 10·5 per cent. What has happened to the Secretary of State's promise to the House that this year rates would not go above the rate of inflation?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman does not give the base from which those figures spring. He may know that Gillingham has, over many years, had zero rate rises.

Mr. Oppenheim: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the scurrilous leaflet that was sent out with the rate demand by Derbyshire county council, which claimed that the council's spending since Labour took control in 1981 had hardly risen at all? In fact, its spending had risen by 69 per cent. Does not this false and misleading propaganda, which is sent out with a rate demand, add insult to injury?

Mr. Ridley: Derbyshire's rate for 1988-89, at 297·5p, is the highest of all county councils. I should tell my hon. Friend that since the Conservatives lost control in 1981, the council has sacrificed £50 million in central Government grant as a result of its overspending. That is a burden of £70 per head for each domestic ratepayer.

Bed-and-breakfast Accommodation

3. **Mrs. Wise:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest figure for the number of families in bed and breakfast accommodation in England and Wales.

Mr. Waldegrave: The latest figure for England is 10,370.

Mrs. Wise: Does the Minister accept that the figure is still unacceptably high? Does he understand that the system means that mothers and babies must frequently spend their days walking the streets, while large amounts of public money are diverted into the private pockets of the owners of bed-and-breakfast establishments? When will he allow councils to solve homelessness by providing proper homes for rent?

Mr. Waldegrave: I agree with the hon. Lady that bed and breakfast is the most unsatisfactory form of short-term accommodation. That is agreed between us and councils. There is a very wide gap between the use that councils of all parties make of it. For example, Labour-controlled Greenwich makes virtually no use of it, although it has acute problems. The hon. Lady will welcome, as I do, the slight drop in the last quarter's figures, which is in response to the £25 million that we released to help with this problem just before Christmas.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Will my hon. Friend confirm that it would be a very good start if, particularly, Labour councils stopped keeping council accommodation empty at the expense of homeless families in their areas? Would it not be a good idea for councils to put homeless families in such properties and not pretend that they do not have the money or the resources to deal with the problem?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. A couple of weeks ago we released another £28 million, which will be targeted on getting empty and void local authority properties back into use. We have had a very good response from local authorities bidding for such money.

Mr. Soley: If the Minister is so ashamed of the Conservative party's record, why did the Government allow the matter to get into such an appalling state in the

first place? Previous Conservative and Labour Governments did not allow it to get so bad. Conservative councils are complaining because they have to make use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Only 2·4 per cent. of council properties are empty, compared with 6·9 per cent. of Government-owned properties. When will the hon. Gentleman take this problem seriously, so that we do not have families living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation for several years, families breaking up, families in poor health and children under-achieving in education?

Mr. Waldegrave: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the gap between the performance of the best and the worst councils—and the worst, I am afraid, are run by the Labour party—is so dramatic that there is no need to keep families with children in bed-and-breakfast accommodation for months at a time. That is a fact which many Labour councils know well and show very clearly.

Under-utilised Land

4. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many acres of underutilised land, handed over to the Property Services Agency by Government Departments for disposal, has not been sold after 12 months.

10. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much derelict land has been handed over to the Property Services Agency by Government Departments for disposal and has not been sold after 12 months.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): As at 31 December 1987 a total of 2,558 acres of surplus landed property sites which had been passed to the PSA for disposal remained unsold after 12 months.

Mr. Bowis: Am I right in thinking that most of the land is owned by the Ministry of Defence? Will my hon. Friend confirm that I would be right in having confidence in his being able, with his usual courtesy and irresistibility, to persuade the PSA to put its delicate feet on the accelerator and sell off its land so that it can be put to good use?

Mr. Chope: Almost all that land is surplus defence land. It represents less than 0·5 per cent. of the total defence estate of almost 700,000 acres. About 1,000 acres are agricultural and are subject to offer beck to the former owners. That process takes longer than a straightforward sale.

I assure my hon. Friend that the Property Services Agency is selling the land rapidly—at the rate of over 2,200 acres per year for the past four years.

Mr. David Nicholson: Should not that programme have an even higher priority? Does my hon. Friend recognise the paradox and the frustration that I and several hon. Members feel when we see controversy over housing development in the green field sites in our constituencies, but whenever we travel, as I did recently, to the west midlands or the Greater Manchester conurbation, we see vast tracts of derelict and under-used land, which is owned by a variety of authorities?

Mr. Chope: I share my hon. Friend's frustration at the amount of under-used land that could be brought into development, especially when it could be brought into housing use. That is why the Government are giving a high priority to ensuring that they dispose of their own land quickly.

Mr. Steen: If my hon. Friend is, understandably, frustrated by the amount of land that is still on the register, will he explain why all Crown land is excluded from the register? Will he tell the House how many acres of vacant, derelict and dormant land in his own Department is not being used or put to good use?

Mr. Chope: Much of the land that we have been describing is on the register, although it belongs to the Crown. There is no legal obligation on the Crown to put land on the register, but, as a matter of practice, the Property Services Agency does include the land in the register.

Mr. McCartney: The Minister has stated the Government's commitment to dispose of derelict land and the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) commented on the vast tracts of land in Greater Manchester. Is it not a fact that in Greater Manchester Labour local authorities have one of the largest and the best programmes of derelict land reclamation in Europe? One difficulty that frustrates us is that the Government have not provided the additional resources to maintain the type of activity that promotes the regeneration of urban land in both the public and private sectors. If the Government make that commitment, will the Minister increase greatly the resources available to local authorities which have such programmes so that they can develop them, in conjunction with public and private enterprise?

Mr. Chope: The Government are aware of the problems in Manchester, which is why we have given extra priority and set up an urban development corporation there.

Competitive Tendering

5. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will be in a position to set out a timetable for implementation of the provisions on competitive tendering of the Local Government Act.

Mr. Chope: Following extensive consultations, my hon. and learned Friend announced a detailed timetable on 30 March. The amendments to our original proposals should help authorities achieve the maximum benefits from the competitive process.

Mr. Day: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not necessary for local authorities to wait for the timetable, and that as competitive tendering is a desirable development they should get on with it now on their own initative?

Mr. Chope: I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. Indeed, those authorities that have already submitted their services to competitive tender have substantial savings to show for it. As about £3 billion of expenditure is at stake in those services, the sooner local authorities put them out to competitive tender, the sooner the savings will materialise.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister accept that local authorities are concerned about the possible extension of the Act to cover recreation and leisure facilities and that that would be harmful to the provision of sports facilities and many other amenities for local communities? Will he

now say that the Government are no longer prepared to defer that decision and that they will not include those facilities in the Act?

Mr. Chope: No, I will not say that. It is a complicated matter, which is why we have been in consultation. We are considering the representations that have been made. The principle that massive savings will be made by submitting services to competition applies generally.

Mr. Wilshire: Will my hon. Friend accept the congratulations of the House on making the progress that has been achieved? Will he now give serious thought to the remainder of local government services and bring forward another list that features administrative and financial services, which have had the least exposure so far to competition?

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend is right in emphasising that there are similar savings to be made by submitting administrative services to competition. I hope that local authorities will go down that road voluntarily, rather than our having to compel them to do so.

Crown Suppliers

6. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress of the privatisation of the Crown Suppliers.

Mr. Chope: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on 25 March.

Mr. Dalyell: How is the public interest to be taken into account and how are severance pay and pensions to be guaranteed?

Mr. Chope: The public interest will always be taken into account in any privatisation project. Accrued pension rights will be fully protected, or transferred to the new pension scheme if the staff so wishes.

Mr. Hind: I hope that my hon. Friend will take into consideration the concerns of the Crown Suppliers' employees. Will he ensure that he listens carefully to the views of the unions that represent the work force? Will he ensure also that their pensions and terms and conditions of employment following privatisation are properly looked after?

Mr. Chope: I assure my hon. Friend that I shall take into account the views of staff. On a recent visit to Hastings, where the Crown Suppliers employ more than 100 people, I had a face-to-face meeting with members of the staff.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is the Minister aware that many of us do not believe that savings will be available from this privatisation? For example, the Minister decided to have Richmond Terrace valued by private valuers at a charge of £40,000, when there were officials within the Department of the Environment who were capable of making the valuation for £1,200? Is it not true that the Minister lost the taxpayer over £38,000 due to the stupidity of his decision, which was taken as a result of his obsessive attitudes to privatisation?

Mr. Chope: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman has his mathematics right. The decision that the private sector should value Richmond Terrace was taken in the best interests of government. It was the first time that there had been any new office development in the Whitehall area for many years and it was important to obtain an expert assessment of the rental value and the opportunity-costs of the offices.

Mr. Boyes: It is clear that the Minister is not taking into account the views of the staff. Since his statement on the future of Crown Suppliers on 3 February, and the parliamentary questions that followed it, he has given neither trade unions nor the House any assurances about the future of the work force. Is the Minister aware that of the 171 staff who have requested a transfer, 138 have given privatisation as a reason for doing so? Given the low morale of the work force, is not the Minister's callous treatment of it utterly reprehensible?

Mr. Chope: No, it is not. Following the discussions which I had with members of the work force in Hastings, to which I referred, I understand that the work force has accepted that I am taking close account of its interests in this matter.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the unsatisfactory nature of the Minister's reply, I shall seek to raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Inner Urban Land Sales

7. **Mr. Heddle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate the number of acres of derelict and disused inner urban land sold by local authorities since the enactment of the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1982.

Mr. Ridley: By 31 March 1988, 4,400 acres of land owned by urban programme authorities had been removed from the registers of unused and under-used land because the land had been sold. The first registers were compiled in 1981 under the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980.

Mr. Heddle: Will my right hon. Friend accept that his efforts and those of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier), in compelling local authorities, statutory undertakers and the Inner London education authority and others to dispose of the land they have sat upon for far too long has been impressive? Will he acknowledge that since much of the land is in inner city and inner urban areas, the cut-off point of one acre for eligibility on the public land register is rather ridiculous and should be eliminated? Will he also acknowledge that the procedure that has to be adopted to obtain a derelict land grant is cumbersome and bureaucratic?

Mr. Ridley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I confirm the importance of the programme, which is vital to inner city regeneration. There is still far too much land in the inner cities lying idle in local authority control. I shall look again at the one acre cut-off point that my hon. Friend mentioned. It is now possible to obtain a derelict land grant through the city grant, which goes straight from the Government to the developer. It may be helpful now that we have introduced the city grant.

Mr. Morley: Does the Minister agree that, with the growing demand for single person and pensioner accommodation, particularly in the rented sector, it would make sense to give local councils an increase in their

housing investment programmes so that they can utilise and buy derelict land in order to provide much needed housing in urban and inner city areas?

Mr. Ridley: Many councils own a large amount of land that they could sell to obtain further spending power to build houses. Instead, they prefer to hang on to assets.

Mr. Gow: As my right hon. Friend has made it clear that local authorities are still holding on to land that is unused or under-used, and as that is a massive waste of resources, will he take further powers to speed up the procedures so that when he gives a direction there will be a much speedier level of sales by local authorities?

Mr. Ridley: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend, but I must point out that in the Local Government Act 1988 we took such additional powers, and they will soon be available for use. They will be used in exactly the way suggested by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Will the Minister say why, over the past two years, the Department of the Environment has instructed only local authorities or ILEA, and no other public bodies, to dispose of land? Will he confirm that the land register does not include derelict and disused land in private ownership, including large tracts previously owned by the now privatised nationalised industries which have been taken off the register? Is he aware that a Town and Country Planning Association survey on waste land to be published this month shows that 62 per cent. of unused or derelict land is privately owned? What is he going to do about that?

Mr. Ridley: If it is true that only local authorities have received directives, it is probably the case that the other bodies concerned have been found to have a reason for not selling the land. I am not prepared to take a step to direct private citizens and private companies to sell assets against their will.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the whole procedure would move much more quickly if local authorities were compelled to grant appropriate planning permission and then sell at auction, without reserve, on condition that the work be put in hand within two years?

Mr. Ridley: I do not know what my hon. Friend means by granting appropriate planning permission. We would be getting into difficulties if we were to specify the use of the land for the maximum advantage of the receipt of profits to the local authority. The two issues of selling unused or under-used land and what planning consent is appropriate for the land are separate questions that should not be mixed up.

Radioactive Waste

8. **Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to review safety relating to the disposal of radioactive waste at inland sites in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Colin Moynihan): The radiological safety of all disposals of radioactive waste in England and Wales is kept under review by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and authorisations are revised if appropriate. Other safety matters are for the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Evans: Is the Minister aware that many hundreds of my constituents are alarmed and concerned about the proposals to dump radioactive waste at a quarry in Billinge in my constituency? What information can the Minister provide about the type of materials to be dumped, how radioactive it is and what steps will be demanded of the owners of the quarry to ensure that no radioactivity will leach from the quarry into the surrounding water courses?

Mr. Moynihan: The type of radioactivity mainly derives from medical applications in the University of Liverpool and the Royal Liverpool hospital. The radioactivity of the material is approximately the equivalent of a microSievert, which is one thousandth of a milliSievert. In practice, one would have to consume about 2 per cent. of the thousands of tonnes of waste to exceed the annual dose of one milliSievert. It is a very low-level waste disposal facility. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution conducted a full radiological assessment of the site before issuing the authorisations. I understand the public concern, but public consultation did take place and there will be constant monitoring, which will include a close working relationship with the waste authority.

Mr. Holt: Notwithstanding the safety regulations, there is considerable concern in my constituency that the only potash mine in the United Kingdom may be turned into a dump for nuclear waste. Will my hon. Friend take the opportunity to say that all the fears and apprehensions in the area are groundless and that that mine will be kept for potash and not used for the disposal of nuclear waste?

Mr. Moynihan: I have no knowledge of that site. Suffice it to say that Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, and the need to stay closely under the authorisations provided under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960, both ensure the strictest possible control. I shall look into the question of using the potash mine and let my hon. Friend know the precise position.

Mr. Frank Cook: May I refer the Minister to the consultative document issued by Nirex, which, as he knows, gives a range of options for public consideration and asks for reactions? The Minister will be aware that one option is missing, namely, the containment of radioactive materials which are produced on the sites of power stations at the surface, constantly monitored, and redeemable at source. Why has that been excluded? Will he ensure that it is included for future consultation?

Mr. Moynihan: The hon. Member will know well that that is for Nirex to answer. No site has been ruled out. As for the Billingham site, to which the hon. Gentleman has referred on other occasions, the Secretary of State has said that he will take into account the commitments made by his predecessors. It is a matter for Nirex to consult on the method and to make appropriate recommendations.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will my hon. Friend comment on the emotive word "dump"? For decades we have been storing low level and intermediate waste in the said power stations. All the proposals of Nirex are to make what is already a safe storage system even safer.

Mr. Moynihan: I agree with my hon. Friend.

Council Accommodation (Purchase)

9. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department has made any estimate of private landlords' interest in purchasing council accommodation.

Mr. Waldegrave: No, although we know that a number of housing associations are interested in responding to any tenant interest that may be shown.

Mrs. Fyfe: Does the Minister agree that that answer is somewhat strange, considering how much effort the Department has put into encouraging private landlords? Can he explain how their involvement will benefit tenants? Will rents go down? Will the repair service improve? Will tenants get better value for money? In short, will the Government bring in legislation to force private landlords to give the same deal to tenants as council landlords would give?

Mr. Waldgrave: I think the hon. Lady is in some confusion. Perhaps she does not know, but any landlord will have to be approved by the Housing Corporation. Indeed, if tenants wish to transfer it will probably be because they will get a better deal on some of the matters that the hon. Lady has mentioned.

Mr. Forth: In considering the matter raised by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs! Fyfe), can my hon. Friend say how many council properties are vacant in, for example, Glasgow? Does he not believe that it is unlikely that private landlords would allow property to remain empty for any period and that, therefore, homelessness would be addressed much more effectively under private landlords than it ever has been under council ownership?

Mr. Waldegrave: One of my misfortunes is that I have no responsibility for Glasgow. It is noticeable that Glasgow city council—a council dominated not by the Conservative party but by the Labour party—has followed some very imaginative policies of devolving property to community-based housing associations. I believe that some tenants have found advantages in that system. The purpose of our Bill is to extend that very principle.

Ms. Ruddock: Further to the Minister's first answer, we in the London borough of Lewisham, particularly in my constituency of Deptford, are concerned about the interest of private landlords in our housing estates. Have there been approaches from private landlords about our council estates? Are the Government about to announce any programme for imposing housing action trusts on the borough?

Mr. Waldegrave: It is too early, and unwise, for private landlords to canvass on these estates, because there will be a thoroughgoing system of approval, run by the Housing Corporation, and of tenant involvement in any cases where transfers are of interest to tenants. It is unwise of private landlords to carry out this sort of canvassing before that system is functioning. Housing action trusts are a separate matter and, as we have said, we shall bring forward a shortlist while the Housing Bill is before the House.

Land Development (Planning Presumption)

11. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to repeal those parts of the Town and Country Planning Act 1947 which give a planning presumption in favour of the developer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: No, Sir.

Mr. Adley: I thank my hon. Friend for that illuminating and helpful answer. Does he agree that planning needs and environmental attitudes have changed fundamentally since the days of war-ravaged Britain in 1947, when that legislation was introduced? Does he agree also that today's planning law should meet today's requirements and, in particular, should take account of the fact that parts of the country suffer from over-development, not under-development?

Mr. Waldegrave: The Town and Country Planning Act 1947 and its successor, the 1971 Act, have stood this country in good stead. They can deliver the kind of planning that we need. It is true that requirements change from time to time. In 1980 the Department issued a circular emphasising the importance of getting planning applications agreed and reminding authorities that they must always grant permission unless there are important reasons for not doing so. Since then we have drawn the inspectors' attention to the importance of taking account of up-to-date plans so that there is no over-development.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: The Minister will be aware of the grave concern in my constituency about the Government's insistence that the Greater Manchester Residuary Body sell off parts of Reddish Vale. Will the Minister give a categorical assurance that if that sale is pushed through planning permission will not be granted for any development that would deny the people of Greater Manchester an important area of rural land that could be used for recreational purposes? Will the hon. Gentleman guarantee that that land will be protected for the walkers, fishermen and others who enjoy it?

Mr. Waldegrave: It would be wrong for me to pre-empt a planning application, which should be considered on its merits. I am sure that the important issues which the hon. Gentleman has raised will be taken into account at the proper time.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: Is my hon. Friend aware that in areas that have suffered from excessive development, such as Berkshire, the democratically elected representatives on the local authorities particularly resent the large number of appeals granted to developers, which give the clear impression that there is a presumption in favour of developers.

Mr. Waldegrave: There is a presumption in favour of development—that is the basis of the system. The British system is that people can do what they like with their property as long as an important interest is not damaged thereby. It is a good system. I remind my hon. Friend that more than 50 per cent. of appeals are for residential development and that there is a much lower success rate in such appeals. It is worth drawing that point to the attention of developers because, to some extent, they are overloading the system with appeals, the great majority of which will be turned down.

Radioactive Waste

12. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many consultation meetings Nirex has held in Britain concerning its plans for radioactive waste disposal.

Mr. Moynihan: I have no ministerial responsiblity for the day-to-day management of Nirex, but I understand from Nirex that between the launch of its discussion document on 12 November and the end of March the company held 34 meetings about its plans for a radioactive waste disposal facility. A further nine meetings are planned to take place before the end of May.

Mr. Wallace: I am not sure whether the Minister is aware that one of the proposed meetings is with the Shetland Islands council. Does he appreciate that Nirex will be told in no uncertain terms that burial of nuclear waste on a small island is not an acceptable proposition? Does he agree that one of the ways of getting away from the problem of the "not in my back yard" attitude is to adopt the suggestion made earlier by the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) to have on-site storage? The Minister said that Nirex was consulting, but it is not consulting about that. Why is it not consulting about that when it is acceptable for high-level waste, but not acceptable for intermediate-level waste?

Mr. Moynihan: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, I am sure that Nirex will be most grateful for advance notice of the content of the consultation meeting that is due to take place.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, it was made clear after detailed consideration that Nirex should consider three options for a deep dual-purpose disposal facility—deep burial on land, tunnelling under the sea from the shore and disposal into the seabed from an offshore structure. That decision took place after detailed consideration of the potential scientific implications.

Mr. Jack: When my hon. Friend receives information from Nirex on those consultations, will he urge Nirex to make it clear to everybody that there are certain parts of the country with, for example, a strong tourist industry, such as the Fylde coast, which would not be suitable for the disposal of nuclear waste?

Mr. Moynihan: It has been made clear on many occasions in this House, and quite rightly so, that no area of the country should be excluded from Nirex's detailed consideration and investigation.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: The Minister will be aware, from the number of questions put to him today by hon. Members on both sides of the House, that there is considerable concern about Nirex's proposals. Will he tell the House when he expects the consultation procedure to be concluded and when he expects to receive Nirex's report on its proposals and to be able to tell us that either he or the Secretary of State can come to the House with a decision?

Mr. Moynihan: There are three questions and three answers. The consultative period will last until the end of May. Nirex's target for coming forward with a proposal is towards the end of the year and, obviously, a full parliamentary debate will take place as soon as possible thereafter.

Rates

13. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the level of increase in rates in 1988-89.

Mr. Chope: Domestic rates in England have gone up by an average of nearly 9 per cent., which is far too high. It should have been possible, on average, for rate rises to be held to inflation, and against this background the outturn is very disappointing.

Mr. Marshall: Will my hon. Friend tell the House how the level of rates in Conservative-controlled councils compares with the level of rates in Labour-controlled councils? Does he agree that the great difference between those two levels explains the opposition of Opposition Members to the community charge?

Mr. Chope: I am delighted to have the opportunity to explain to my hon. Friend the difference between Conservative and Labour councils. Conservative councils have much lower rate poundages than Labour councils. The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) earlier quoted percentage increases. After those percentage increases, in Melton, for example, there is only a 5·8p local rate and in Gillingham only a 7p local rate, whereas in Harlow, a district council controlled by the Labour party, there is 92·9p local rate. There are almost invariably higher levels of rates in those areas controlled by the Labour party.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Minister come clean about the Tory record on rates? In Labour-run counties in England, Labour has had an average of 12·4 per cent. rate income, Conservative-run counties have had an average of 10·3 per cent. and councils run by my party have had an average of 9·7 per cent.—in each case in councils controlled by a majority, single-party administration. Why is his party not at the bottom of any league table of rate rises in the counties of England this year?

Mr. Chope: The Owenites do not feature on this list——

Mr. Simon Hughes: Because they do not control any councils.

Mr. Chope: Exactly. The average rate poundage in the counties is 223p in the pound. The three highest county poundages are in Derbyshire, Cleveland and Humberside, all of which are in excess of 250p in the pound. The lowest rate poundages in the counties are under the Conservative-controlled councils of Hereford and Worcestershire, Norfolk, Kent and West Sussex. In all those counties the rate poundages are less than 200p.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Labour group on Lancashire county council increased rates by no less than 36·5, an increase of 18·5 per cent., which is one of the highest rises in the country? It started from a high base, having already increased rates by over 85 per cent. since it took control. Does my hon. Friend appreciate that that places a tremendous burden on the National Health Service, industry and every citizen?

Mr. Chope: I agree with my hon. Friend wholeheartedly. Lancashire council is one of the worst examples of Labour profligacy in practice and I am delighted that she has been able to draw the attention of the House to it. Opposition Members are hard put to explain away the high levels of rates in Labour-controlled areas.

Mr. Rooker: If 9 per cent. is too high, why is it that in Tory-controlled Wandsworth the rate is 31 per cent.? Why is it 15·6 per cent. in the London borough of Barnet, where the Hendon, South constituency is situated? That is the Prime Minister's local authority and it is on record as being against the poll tax. What is more, it has accused the Secretary of State of cheating over storm damage. Why have we not heard about the London borough of Barnet, which has twice the average level of rate increases among councils under Tory control?

Mr. Chope: To take individual percentage rate increases—*[Interruption.]* It is much easier for someone who weighs 20 stone to lose 25 per cent. of that weight than for somebody who weighs only 10 stone. The same is—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is difficult enough to understand as it is.

Mr. Chope: To take the areas to which the hon. Gentleman referred, in inner London it is still true to say that the two lowest levels of rate poundage are in Kensington and Chelsea and in Wandsworth. In Wandsworth the local rate is now 36·1p in the pound, in Hammersmith it is 133p, in Hackney it is 134p and in Greenwich it is 136p. The same is true in outer London, where Barnet council, despite a high percentage increase, still has a much lower rate poundage than most Labour-controlled outer London boroughs.

Housing Development (East London)

14. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will examine the potential for more housing development on derelict sites in east London.

Mr. Waldgrave: Yes, Sir. The Department is commissioning and announcing today studies by a consultant into the scope for housing development on five large areas in east London—the Greenwich peninsula, Barking Reach, the Lower Lea valley, the Stratford rail yards and the Beckton gasworks site.

Mr. Taylor: I thank my hon. Friend for that encouraging information. In the light of that, will he consider increasing penalties on developers who repeatedly appeal on green belt sites, such as in my constituency, so as to encourage them to turn their attention to developing inner-city areas to meet the housing needs of the south-east?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. On several occasions we have warned that we shall use our powers to award costs against developers who fly in the face of clear planning guidance, and I have no doubt that there will be some examples of that. The sites that we are talking about could conceivably, at a broad guess, contain about 20,000 or 30,000 houses.

Inner Cities (Sport)

15. **Mr. Pendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will next meet the chairman of the Sports Council to discuss sport in the inner cities.

Mr. Moynihan: I hold regular meetings with the chairman of the Sports Council on a range of sporting issues. The specific issue of sport in the inner cities is the subject of a review which I have recently begun. The membership of the review team is made up of business men, athletes and sports administrators, including two members of the Sports Council.

Mr. Pendry: When the Minister next meets the chairman of the Sports Council, will he discuss the poor provision for athletics in the inner cities, which must be a contributory factor in the importation of a South African runner, Zola Budd, and her acquiring British nationality in order to qualify for the Olympic games? Will the Minister stand by all those British athletes, many of whom come from the inner cities, who have toiled hard to qualify for the Seoul Olympics? Will he also back the IAAF's decision in the Budd affair and stand as firmly behind that decision as he did behind the Thatcher Government boycott of the Olympic Games in 1980?

Mr. Moynihan: The BAAB has upheld the Gleneagles agreement. The specific issue for its consideration with regard to Zola Budd relates to the IAAF's interpretation of "taking part". It is not a matter for the Government.

Mr. John Carlisle: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Sports Council and the British Amateur Athletic Board have done admirable work in the inner cities, but that the reputation of both organisations, including the board, will be greatly enhanced if they stand firm in objecting to the proposal by the IAAF to ban Zola Budd? Many British athletes would support the British board if it took that step.

Mr. Moynihan: I am sure that the BAAB will have heard clearly what my hon. Friend has had to say.

Ms. Abbott: Does my hon. Friend not agree—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are listening to the hon. Lady.

Ms. Abbott: Does the Minister agree that Zola Budd, far from being a poor little girl, as one Government Member said of her, is in fact a walking, talking and running public relations stunt for apartheid in South Africa? It would be a slap in the face for the hundreds of black athletes who run for Britain and the Commonwealth if the Government were not seen to support both the letter and the spirit of the Gleneagles agreement.

Mr. Moynihan: I strongly disagree with the hon. Lady's personal view of Zola Budd. As for the Gleneagles agreement, the Government are committed, along with Commonwealth countries, to uphold that agreement, which has nothing to do with the specific decision that the BAAB has to face on Sunday.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Will my hon. Friend accept that no good will be done for sport in the inner cities or anywhere else in the United Kingdom, or throughout the world, if an innocent but very talented young athlete is treated in a disgraceful way by any international board when she has committed no offence? Is it not wrong, as we have seen with terrorism, to give in to blackmail?

Mr. Moynihan: The House has clearly heard the comments of my hon. Friend.

Mr. Denis Howell: I am always here when needed. May I ask the Minister to ensure that, in any discussions concerning Zola Budd, he will not repeat the Government's tragic mistakes of 1980 in respect of the Moscow Olympics, which has alienated international sporting opinion from this country ever since? Does he accept that the International Amateur Athletics Federation has an absolute duty to protect sport from any

taint of apartheid? Does he further accept that the Government have a duty to protect the rights of every other British sports man and sports woman taking part in this year's Olympic Games?

Mr. Moynihan: The right hon. Member knows full well that the decisions to be taken on this issue are a matter for the governing bodies. That must be right, and that view should be shared on both sides of the House. We need to await the outcome of the meeting held by the BAAB on Sunday and we shall carefully consider the situation then, to decide whether, so far as the Gleneagles agreement is concerned, it becomes a matter for the Government.

London Marathon

16. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent discussions he has had about the future organisation of the London marathon.

Mr. Moynihan: Neither my right hon. Friend nor I have had recent discussions on the future organisation of the London marathon.

Mr. Canavan: May I take this opportunity of congratulating the organisers, spectators and over 23,000 runners who made last Sunday's marathon the biggest and best in the world? So that it continues to be so, will the Minister use his influence with the London Residuary Body to try to ensure that the organisers are given the use of county hall for just one weekend every year, in accordance with the parliamentary petition presented last week by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), with more than a quarter of a million signatures?

Mr. Moynihan: I join the hon. Gentleman in offering my congratulations to all who participated and assisted in the organisation of the London marathon. It was a showpiece festival of national and international sport, and it was excellent to see the involvement at élite and participatory level of so many disabled athletes.

I recognise the present uncertainty about the future of county hall. While the London Residuary Body is unable to give guarantees about the availability for the race next year, because county hall is being sold, I can confirm that the LRB, with any support that I can give, will do everything possible to impress on new owners the importance attached to county hall by the organisers of the marathon.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c

Ordered,

That the Local Government (Allowances) (Amendment) Regulations 1988 (S.I., 1988, No. 358) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—[*Mr. Peter Lloyd.*]

Small Firms (Liberation)

3.31 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to remove all administrative and legislative obstacles to the growth of small businesses.

I believe that this is the first time in the history of the House that a Bill has been addressed to Parliament with the word "liberation" in its title. There is room for many more such Bills. We have far too much regulation in this country, and it shackles the enterprise of our people.

You may wonder, Mr. Speaker, why, given the amount of legislation that has passed through the House in recent times designed to help small businesses, I have tabled the Bill. No Government since the Glorious Revolution of 1688 has better understood the significance of property rights and markets in creating prosperity in our society. It is puzzling, however, that given the sincerity of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Young, the Secretary of State for enterprise, in wishing to remove obstacles to enterprise, the day-to-day reality of running a small firm is that for every obstacle that appears to be removed two more seem to be created, and small businesses still feel that they are often engulfed by the weight of legislation that they have to administer.

The Minister with responsibility for small business, my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Cope), tells me that 500 small firms are created each week. That comes to the surprising total of 250,000 each year. Yet, if we examine the statistics of the VAT returns, we find that of small firms—those with a turnover of £100,000 or less—the number remains stagnant at round 2 million. So where do all these new businesses go? The sad thing is that many of them fail before they reach their third birthday.

High failure rate among small firms is of course inevitable. Setting up a business on one's own is a high-risk game. One's fate is no longer in one's own hands, but is in those of the customers. If they do not like what is on offer, that is the end of it. That is a natural part of business. What is not inevitable, and is unnecessary, is the amount of work that we pile on to small firms.

Perhaps I should say what I mean by a small firm. I mean a firm whose proprietor does most of the paper work. Fifty per cent. of the firms in this country employ fewer than five people, and those are the ones that I am talking about.

Such firms find that their most precious commodity is not money but time, and we rob them of that time when we demand priority for Government paper work. The hours that we make them spend on calculating tax for the Government, for example, mean that many of them do not have the time to get on with the work of making the business grow. It cannot be said too many times that small firms do not so much need more handouts and tax schemes as exemption from rules and regulations which constrict them and deflect them from their essential job.

In the 10 minutes at my disposal I want to confine myself to three areas which are critical and upon which the Government could act without major legislation. The first concerns the time when a business begins. Soon after it is set up it will find itself in need of an extra pair of hands. Naturally, it will want to engage that extra help in as easy a way as possible. It would rather use people in a flexible, self-employed capacity—but here enters the Inland Revenue, which says that it cannot. Instead, it asks the business to set up a PAYE scheme and presents it with a 2½ lb starter pack consisting of two sets of tax tables, a set of national insurance tables, a blue card, a deduction working sheet, an employment record card, five assorted booklets and forms P15, P24, P34, P45, P46 and P47—in all, about 100,000 words to read and digest.

Faced with this penalty, it is not surprising that many proprietors of small firms will decide that they would rather struggle on and not take on the extra pair of hands. That is a tragedy, not only for them but for the country. It is well known that small firms will often engage people who are not well qualified for more formal jobs in larger businesses, and by deterring them we are adding to unemployment and possibly driving these people into the underground economy, not so much to dodge tax but merely because they cannot cope with the paper work that the Government demand.

My first proposal is that the Government allow small firms to engage up to five people as self-employed people, rather than having to set up all the paper work that is necessary for a PAYE scheme. It is then up to the Inland Revenue to make its arrangements with the individuals concerned. The second stage at which the business wants help would be when it begins to expand. At that point it needs more capital. I run a small business and I know that a good year's profits—*[Interruption.]*—leading on to another busy year, means that the money one has made in the first year is needed in the firm. But along comes the Inland Revenue with its tax demands and takes that money away.

If a stranger invests in a firm, he can, under the Government's enterprise scheme, offset up to £40,000 a year against his tax liability. I propose that small firms be allowed to retain up to £40,000 of their own profits to finance the next stage of growth. That is no different from the concession given to complete strangers and would have a dramatic effect on the expansion of small businesses.

My third proposal concerns the amount of legislation that this House churns out in the vain hope that we can reform human nature through regulations. I adduce two examples: the Financial Services Act 1986, which is currently causing many problems, and the Data Protection Act 1984, under which, according to *The Daily Telegraph*, prosecutions against many of the 100,000 small firms that have yet to register are about to be initiated. That would mean a fine of £2,000 for each firm, the slaughter of the innocents, because they failed to register—*[Interruption.]*—on time.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to give the hon. Lady a quiet hearing.

Mrs. Gorman: If 100,000 firms have not found the time to catch up with the legislation, that represents the biggest revolt against Government regulations in history.

Therefore, my third proposal is that all such legislation should have a lead-in time of two years, which will give businesses more chance to get their act together. Of course, many of them will still not be able to cope, which is a tragedy.

The Soviet Union has realised the value of small businesses. It is adopting a policy of perestroika, which I believe means enlightenment. Under that enlightenment, members of the KGB are now allowed to be self-employed.

There are more KGB personnel in Russia than there are self-employed people in this country. I do not quite know what lessons we can learn from this, but I do know that all Communist countries now realise the importance of self-employment and small businesses, and they are moving heaven and earth to get rid of the obstacles that prevent them from growing.

The Government should look into the problems that still remain for small businesses and get on with the business of liberating them from the tyranny of these regulations.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mrs. Teresa Gorman, Mr. David Shaw, Miss Emma Nicholson, Mr. Robert G. Hughes, Mrs. Gillian Shephard, Mr. George Gardiner, Mr. Barry Field, Mr. Ian Taylor, Mr. David Evans, Mr. Graham Riddick, Mr. David Davis, and Mr. Alistair Burt.

SMALL FIRMS (LIBERATION)

Mrs. Teresa Gorman accordingly presented a Bill to remove all administrative and legislative obstacles to the growth of small businesses: And the same was read the First time, and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 8 July and to be printed. [Bill 143.]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That at this day's sitting the Motion in the name of Mr. John Wakeham relating to the Conduct of the honourable Member for Edinburgh, Leith may be proceeded with, though opposed, for one and a half hours after it has been entered upon, and if proceedings thereon have not been disposed of at the end of that period, Mr. Speaker shall then put any Questions necessary to dispose of such proceedings.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Points of Order

3.42 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I draw your attention to a communication that I received in an envelope in my slot in the Members' Lobby yesterday. I opened the envelope and found a communication that had been sent to me by a Kent Conservative Member announcing the closure of the profitable Matthew Brown brewery in Workington. I have not been able to locate that Conservative Member today, and therefore I am unable to name him in the Chamber, but he is a paid hack for Scottish and Newcastle Breweries.

Mr. Speaker: Order. No hon. Member is a paid hack. The hon. Gentleman must withdraw that comment. *[Interruption.]* Order. Withdraw it, please.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I have been advised that I should say "salaried hack", but I know that that term would equally not be permissible. Therefore, I withdraw it and refer to him as a paid consultant.

My point of order is simple. Is it proper for a person who is paid by private industry to represent its interests in the House of Commons to use internal House facilities to send messages of that nature to other hon. Members? Indeed, is it right in principle that a Conservative Member of Parliament should announce to Parliament the closure of a profitable business in my constituency? May we have an inquiry into the incident?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Provided that that hon. Member has declared his interest in the Register of Members' Interests, it would be in order for him to put a letter on the board.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I have said that, so far as I can see, it is in order. I cannot see that anything else arises.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Perhaps you will consider the matter afresh, Mr. Speaker. It might well be in order for the hon. Gentleman to have an interest and to declare it in the register, but I put it to you that it is not correct for him to use our internal systems to pursue that interest.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member should have declared that in the correspondence as well as on the register. If there is any dispute about it, the right thing for the hon. Member to do is to take the matter to the Select Committee on Members' Interests.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Given the terms of the motion relating to the business of the House, will you, Mr. Speaker, confirm that if the motion relating to the conduct of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) continues past 11.30 pm there will be no opportunity to debate the statutory instrument relating to community charges in Scotland? We want to discuss the statutory instruments and we should not give any further publicity than is necessary to the third motion on the Order Paper but should dispatch it quickly.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is correct because the subsequent business is a prayer, which must end at 11.30 pm.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). Are we to understand that hon. Members who are salaried by companies—of which there are many on the Conservative Benches—can now use the House's facilities to lobby and badger other people? It is appalling that Parliament's facilities should be used to promote the private interests of Conservative Members. If anyone is bringing the House into disrepute, it is Conservative Members who represent private companies——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members regularly use the letter board. I have made the position clear.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Further to the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). You, Mr. Speaker, may recall that a few days ago Scottish and Newcastle Breweries gave notice of its intention to move from Workington to elsewhere to keep the company in being and to be competitive. Its name was besmirched by the hon. Member for Workington. He used phrases such as "the rape of Workington", "criminal bandits" and "industrial pirates". We must be fair and place on record the fact that Scottish and Newcastle Breweries is a Rolls-Royce company. It wants to remain in being, and to do so it must be competitive in a very competitive world. It is not right that hon. Members should use such language in the House.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is not a matter for me, but I often say that we must be careful about besmirching individuals—and we should not besmirch good beer either.

Later——

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologise for raising this matter, but I am confused about what you said to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). Perhaps you will confirm, in simple language, that motions Nos. 3 and 4 must be completed by 11.30 pm. Is that the implication of your ruling?

Mr. Speaker: We cannot get on to motion No. 4—Community Charges (Scotland)—until we have disposed of motion No. 3. We have just passed the business of the House motion, which limits debate on motion No. 3 to one and a half hours. To make it perfectly clear, if motion No. 3 continues until 11.30 pm, there will be no time for the prayer.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Surely there is a way of avoiding this problem. Labour Members want to debate the prayer and vote in accordance with the views of our party. Surely it would be easy for the usual channels to undo the damage that has been done by removing from the Order Paper the motion relating to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown). Why should we debate that motion when you, Mr. Speaker, have made it clear that Tory Members can line their pockets every day of the week by picking up directorships——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not make allegations about me.

Mr. Skinner: I have done.

Mr. Speaker: Then he must withdraw them. He must withdraw the allegation that I alleged that Tory Members were lining their pockets. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman was not alleging that? Then we had best get on with the business.

Orders of the Day

Local Government Finance Bill

[3RD ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

Clause 21

ADMINISTRATION AND PENALTIES

3.51 pm

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg to move amendment No. 43, in page 13, line 31, leave out 'and recovery'.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following:

Government amendments Nos. 44 and 47 to 49.

Amendment No. 137, in schedule 2, page 80, line 43, at end insert

'and for this purpose earnings shall not include income support or other social security entitlements'.

Government amendments Nos. 50 to 55.

Amendment (a) to amendment No. 55, in line 9, leave out paragraph (c).

Government amendment No. 56.

Amendment (a) to amendment No. 56, in line 11, leave out paragraph (e).

Government amendments Nos. 45, 46 and 73.

Amendment (b) to amendment No. 73, in paragraph 5, at end insert—

'(5) No attachment orders may be placed on income derived from any social security entitlement'.

Amendment (a) to amendment No. 73, leave out paragraph 7.

Mr. Howard: The main purpose of the Government's amendments is to set out in detail the arrangements for recovering unpaid community charges, civil penalties and rates. These arrangements were foreshadowed in the Bill as introduced, and the new schedule does no more than to spell out the provisions originally set out in paragraphs 5 to 7 of schedule 2.

Broadly speaking, the enforcement of arrangements which currently exist for rates will be carried over to the new system, but with one important difference. In future, charging authorities will be able to attach a person's earnings to recover unpaid community charges.

I have no doubt whatsoever that the great majority of people will pay their community charge just as they pay their rates at present; indeed, by making payment by instalment the norm and by encouraging direct payment methods the incidence of arrears will be reduced. It is essential that local authorities have an adequate framework within which to enforce, where necessary, payment of the community charge.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): Will the Minister clarify whether, when he refers to attachment of earnings, he is also referring to attachment of benefit?

Mr. Howard: I shall deal with that point in a moment, if the hon. Lady will wait.

The provisions in the schedule are reasonably clear, and I do not propose to say anything further about them at this stage.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does the Minister agree from his experience of these matters that the practice by the courts varies from area to area as to whether they take the line of distress, attachment or imprisonment? Is he saying that it is proposed that in future the path to be followed will be the same in every petty sessional division and that a strict order of sequence will be applied?

Mr. Howard: There will be provisions that will lead to greater uniformity in future.

Opposition amendments Nos. 73(a), 55(a) and 56(a) seek to remove the power to commit a person for refusing to pay a community charge or a penalty, non-domestic rates or residual domestic rates respectively. Committal is not widely used: fewer than 400 people were committed for non-payment of rates in 1986. I am confident that considerably fewer will be committed after 1990 because instalments, direct payment methods and obligatory reminders will reduce the need to pursue arrears through the courts. Attachment of earnings will make it much more difficult to refuse to pay.

Mr. Pat Wall (Bradford, North): If people are to have their earnings attached, many employees, particularly those in clerical and managerial work, might have difficulty in meeting payments. Their employers might use that fact as a judgment against them as employees and they could face dismissal. Is there any protection for such people who have their earnings attached?

Mr. Howard: I very much doubt that an attachment of earnings order would justify dismissal in accordance with the procedures of employment protection legislation. I do not think the hon. Gentleman need have any fears on that score.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Will the Minister make reference to a couple in my constituency who have two adult teenage sons? Their current rates bill is £321·70. After the poll tax is introduced they will have to pay £1,460 a year—that is an increase in one year of £1,138·30. The lady works as a lollipop lady, so an attachment of earnings would take all her earnings. Would she be committed to prison?

Mr. Howard: The answer is that the notoriously profligate Labour-controlled London borough of Waltham Forest should bring its spending under control so that the community charge for that area is at a reasonable level which all the hon. Gentleman's constituents will be able to afford.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): The Minister gave his reasons for believing that there will be fewer committals as a result of this legislation, but has he not underestimated one main reason why there are likely to be more committals, which is the unwillingness of people to pay the poll tax because of its blatant unfairness?

Mr. Howard: I do not believe that that will be a factor because, as I said a moment ago, the availability of attachment of earnings orders will make it much more difficult for people to refuse to pay when they have the means so to do.

[Mr. Howard]

We recognise the importance of ensuring that charging authorities have an effective sanction to back up the enforcement provisions. Committal has proved an effective final sanction over the years under the present system, and the small number of people who are imprisoned is a testament to the effectiveness of this power as a deterrent. Without it, local authorities would face a far harder task in collecting their community charge and rate income from those few people who persistently refuse to meet their financial obligations. Indeed, I wonder how local authorities would view the Opposition's attempts, through their amendments, to undermine the recovery system. I am sure that those who have to operate the system recognise the value of committal as a last resort.

It is also important that in those areas where residual domestic rates will be retained for a transitional period local authorities should be able to enforce payment in the same way as for community charges. It would be anomalous if a charging authority taking enforcement action against a person for failing to pay his residual rates and community charge had different enforcement powers available for each bill. It is also desirable that as far as possible there should be consistency in the enforcement procedures for non-domestic rates and community charges.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Has the Department done any work on the number of additional people who will have to be employed by local authorities to bring about recovery? I have been told by Dick Knowles, the Labour leader in Birmingham, that it will have to take on 400 to 600 additional people—which, incidentally, is the figure for Lothian, too—to operate the poll tax. Obviously, not all those people would be involved with recovery, but has any assessment been made of the number of additional people who will be needed?

Mr. Howard: We have made a preliminary assessment, and we are looking at the various estimates that have been made by some of the local authorities concerned to find out whether we can arrive at a more accurate idea of what will be involved.

Amendment No. 137 and amendment (b) to the new schedule seek to prevent the attachment of earnings provision from applying to income from income support or other social security entitlements. We believe that it is important that there should be equality of treatment, wherever possible, between those who are in employment and those who are receiving benefit. Attachment of earnings will be available for defaulters in employment, and it is right that there should be parallel arrangements for income support recipients.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Given that the concept of income support is that it is a minimum amount of money on which people are expected to live, if there is to be attachment of income support, is it not inconsistent that those people will be expected to live at a level below that which the Government have defined as reasonable?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman overlooks the fact that income support will be increased to reflect the liability of those on income support to a residual 20 per cent. of their community charge liability.

It would be quite wrong if people whose benefit had been increased to help them to pay the community charge were able to avoid payment without being subject to the same sanctions as those in employment. The local authority will be able, as in all cases, to take distress proceedings, but, without some provision for attachment of benefit, the only sanction would be commitment to prison if distress proved ineffective.

Mr. Terry Fields (Liverpool, Broadgreen): How will the Minister and the Government tackle the problem where an attempt is made by the Government to attach an individual's earnings, when he is employed by a local authority? He might, for example, be employed in Liverpool where we personally will be campaigning to undermine what the Government are trying to do with the poll tax. We are advocating non-payment of the poll tax. What would the Government do in such circumstances? That problem relates not only to people in Liverpool but to people in other major working-class areas where there is a Labour-controlled council.

4 pm

Mr. Howard: I have made plain what steps will be available to local authorities. I am sure that electors in the city of Liverpool, who will be voting in the local elections in a few days' time, will take careful note of the way in which the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) has pledged the Labour council in Liverpool to defiance of the law and illegal tactics. It is important that we place on record that the hon. Gentleman is nodding vigorously in support of the assertion that Liverpool council will engage in unlawful tactics.

Mr. Terry Fields: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I did not say that Liverpool would. I said that we, the activists in Liverpool, will be advocating that we have a policy that the Liverpool city council refuses to implement. We are campaigning on the estates, and we are campaigning at places of work, to offset what the Government are trying to do to working people.

Mr. Howard: The policy that the hon. Gentleman has been advocating is the policy that he advocates that Liverpool city council should follow. We know what great influence the hon. Gentleman, and those who think like him, have over the affairs of Liverpool city council. That is an important matter which the electors of the city of Liverpool will no doubt take into account when they vote shortly.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): May I pursue the point made by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley)? For those who live in areas where the poll tax will be higher than average, but where income support meets only the national average of the 20 per cent. bracket of differential, will not such people be liable to imprisonment for non-payment? In the words of the Bill, they will be liable to imprisonment for "culpable neglect", on the basis that they have, in theory, the money to pay. In fact, as the hon. Member for Caernarfon said, they will not have the money to pay, because income support will still not meet the total bill which in their area they will be liable to pay.

Mr. Howard: Given the hon. Member's professional background, he must know that that is wrong; culpable neglect is not based on theory. Imprisonment apples only

where there is deliberate non-payment, and where the person has the means with which to pay. The hon. Gentleman must know that that is not based on theoretical considerations. When the matter comes before the court, imprisonment will be available only where there is a wilful refusal to pay by someone, who has the means with which to pay.

Mr. Simon Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Howard: I will give way again. It is an important point.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful. Does the Minister, therefore, mean that in areas where the poll tax is higher than average, where someone is on income support and has less money than they need to pay on the Government's assessment, they will in no case be liable to imprisonment?

Mr. Howard: Of course, that is not the case either. That will by no means follow, either from the question posed by the hon. Gentleman or from my answer to it. That is a different matter. It is something which will be considered by the court in each case and on the facts of each particular case.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Could the Minister clarify one matter, as I do not wish to misunderstand him on this important issue of the relationship between someone who is in employment and someone who is on income support? As I understand it, when three payments are missed, the whole poll tax for the year will become due. Is he advising local authorities to demand from someone the whole of the year's income support contribution, or is he willing to have the payments phased? Will he give advice in terms of a lesser payment than a full year's payment being due? If people get a bill for a full year's income support contribution, they will not know where to turn.

Mr. Howard: I am not giving local authorities any advice whatever on that question.

Mr. Bermingham: Will the Minister put at rest one small problem with regard to the attachment of DHSS benefits, income support benefits, and other such benefits? Will the Minister be advising a level to the amount of attachment? As we have seen with attachment of earnings in the British courts, there is a great variation. What may cause people concern is that when benefits are attached, one may find that in one court they are attached to a rate of £2 or £3 a week, whereas in another court they may be attached at the rate of only 50p per week. Does not the Minister agree that guidelines need to be given to the court in that respect?

Mr. Howard: That is a perfectly reasonable point. There will be a maximum beyond which attachment will not operate as a proportion of benefit or income support.

Ms. Mowlam: Will the Minister be able to tell us what that maximum will be? I am very worried about families on income support, who will get 20 per cent. of the national poll tax average but whose local poll tax might be higher than the average and who may have loans rather than single payments to pay back. They may have a £50 fine for failing to register. Without some knowledge of that maximum, how is that family going to pay?

Mr. Howard: I cannot go into further details on that matter at this stage. Those details will be made public in due course.

In order for charging authorities to be able to arrange for direct payment from benefit, it will be necessary for them to know about a defaulter's source of income. We intend to introduce a duty on people who are subject to a liability order to provide information about their source of income, including income support. That will be on the same lines as the duty in the schedule on those in employment to provide information about their earnings.

We also intend that people claiming income support at their local DHSS office should be invited to complete an application for the 80 per cent. reduction in their community charge to which they will be entitled. That will be passed to the local authority to arrange for the reduction to be credited to their community charge bill. Therefore, local authorities will have the names of the people on income support who will be entitled to the reduction.

We also intend that the names and addresses of income support claimants, who do not apply for reduction, should also be passed to the community charge registration officer. That will be a sensible additional source of information for the registration officer in ensuring that the registers are complete.

The provisions, as they stand, relate only to income from employment. For the reasons that I have given, we think that they should be paralleled by provisions relating to the payment of income support. We shall be bringing forward amendments to the enforcement procedures to give effect to that. Similiar provisions will be made in this respect for Scotland.

I shall be inviting the House to accept the Government amendments in this group, which set out enforcement arrangements for the community charge, non-domestic rates and residual domestic rates. I invite the House to reject the Opposition amendments and those in the name of the Social and Liberal Democratic party, which seek only to undermine those enforcement procedures.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): We now come to an important part of the Bill. All parts that have been chosen for debate under the guillotine are, by definition, important. The Minister, in introducing the amendment, seemed to give the impression that the Government were tidying up matters that had been discussed in Committee. The fact is that Government amendment No. 73 is a new schedule of at least 4,000 words on enforcement, which was not in the Bill on Second Reading or, indeed, in Committee. We should not deal with this matter in the insensitive way in which the Minister introduced these draconian amendments, because the matter is much more serious than that.

The general issues of this debate are fairly wide, taking in enforcement, imprisonment and attachment of earnings and benefit, plus aspects of the administration of the poll tax. The last people with whom I want to have rows or difficulties are my hon. Friends. However, I say to the majority of my hon. Friends, who were not fortunate enough to serve on the Committee, because on our side membership of the Committee was voluntary and not everyone who wished to serve on it had the opportunity to do so, that it is a fundamental misconception that an elected council can decide how it goes about collecting the poll tax.

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

It is fine for individual members of a political party, whether they are councillors or not, to advocate any policy that they like in a democracy. However, the idea that an elected council could advocate a policy of non-collection, non-administration or of slowing down the collection of the poll tax is a non-starter because under the Bill the elected council is not the body with the powers to carry out the collection of the poll tax. The person resposible is the local authority treasurer. A whole swathe of new powers go not to the authority, but to an individually named officer—not to the chief executive, but to the treasurer. In carrying out his or her duties under the law, that treasurer will be responsible not to the employing authority, but to Ministers.

Mr. Terry Fields: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Rooker: I shall give way to my hon. Friend when I have completed this point.

It must be made absolutely clear that it is not a question of elected local government collecting its own local revenue and dealing with its administration in the caring and sensitive ways that are sometimes required and which are followed under the existing system. That will not happen any more because the authority will not have control over that officer——

Mr. Terry Fields *rose*——

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne) *rose*——

Mr. Rooker: I shall give way to my hon. Friend before I give way to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), but I want to complete my point.

The idea of a council or of party members advocating a campaign of non-payment or slowing down the collection in some way, which under the Bill will lead directly to attachment, distress or prison, and then going back to the electors who have suffered that distress, attachment or prison and asking them to vote Labour again to support a Labour council will be an absolute non-starter. The elected local authority will not be in any position to carry out the mandate that is advocated by non-collection or slowing down collection. It is a fundamental misconception that the local authority is in control of that process. It will not be in control when, as presently drafted, the Bill becomes an Act, or in the form that it will be when the amendments are carried.

Mr. Terry Fields: What will the Government do to a local authority that tries to attach the earnings of an employee if that local authority does not comply with the provisions in the Bill? Can my hon. Friend conceive of local authority workers taking a conscious decision that they will not comply with the poll tax? If one is talking about Liverpool and electoral liability, despite the campaign that we waged in Liverpool, the local authority still has mass support. The council and its work force will stand up to defend the rights of ordinary working people, and we will still get their support—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members should not intervene from a sedentary position. They should try to catch Mr. Speaker's eye.

Mr. Rooker: The point is that the local authority will not be in any position to save its employees who take that action because control will be taken completely out of the hands of the local authority.

Mr. Wilshire *rose*——

Mr. Rooker: No. I am explaining the position so that there is no misconception.

There are many ways in which the administration and implementation of the Bill will cause a complete and utter mess in local authority administration. The administration of the poll tax will not work in the way that Ministers intend.

Mr. Wilshire *rose*——

Mr. Rooker: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment, but I want to make this point absolutely clear. We are discussing some crucial and draconian additions to the Bill, for example, imprisonment, which was not originally an option.

4.15 pm

We must get out of our minds the idea that either as a political party or as individuals we can lead such a campaign. It will not be any good asking the local authority to be the long-stop because the local authority does not have the powers. We will not be able to sack the treasurer, tell him to slow down or to go easy, or deprive him or her of resources, manpower or materials, because, under the Bill, he or she can get those resources from the Government and not from the local authority. Treasurers will not be responsible to the local authority at council, sub-committee or committee level. That is why it will be so easy for the Government to blame local authorities for things that go wrong with the poll tax. However, the local authorities are being deprived of many of the powers that are needed to carry out sensitively the administration of this iniquitous tax.

Mr. Wilshire: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the powers about which he is complaining should rest with councillors so that they can openly encourage defiance of the law and can openly encourage an officer to ignore a democratically elected Parliament? Is he saying that he supports the policy of his hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields)? Is the policy of the Labour party to defy democracy and stoke up rebellion?

Mr. Rooker: I know that there is national discussion at the moment about brain transplants, but I shall not give way again to stupid interventions such as that. There are no grounds whatsoever for making that assertion—*[Interruption.]* Well, the hon. Gentleman will be sanctioned in any event by my hon. Friends because we will not give way to him again. The fact is that the hon. Gentleman sat through 150 hours in Committee, and he knows as well as we do that powers have been removed from local authorities and that it will be an individual employee of an authority who will have the powers. Therefore, the idea that there is any long-stop by the local authority is a non-starter.

Mr. Cohen: Is not the logic of my hon. Friend's argument that local authorities, and especially Labour local authorities, could say to their treasurers who, under the Bill, will be responsible for collecting the poll tax, "We are not going to give you any resources because the Government can give those resources"? Should not local authorities say to treasurers, "Go to the Government for those resources", because that would make the Government accountable in those areas?

Mr. Rooker: The Government will not give the treasurers any money. The Government will divert local authority money to give it to the treasurer. It is not a question of trying to gain extra resources because I do not think that it has ever crossed the Minister's mind that extra resources would be available. It will be the local authority's own resources that will be dealt with by Ministers.

The idea of prison was hardly referred to at the outset. Ministers originally wanted imprisonment as a long-stop. When the Government published the Bill, imprisonment was not even a remote possibility. Imprisonment would not have been available to any local authority treasurer or local authority. Although imprisonment is now included in the Bill, we have not had a satisfactory explanation of that.

Attachment of earnings should deal with most cases. Although there will be thousands of such cases, that method will be more practical for the administration because the idea is that the Government can get the money to the local authority through attachment of earnings.

There is also the question of distress. However, it will be difficult to enter a household in which only one person is not paying the poll tax and attempt to seize the television set because there will be an argument in the family about who it belongs to. This is a minefield. Nevertheless, there are sufficient powers to enforce payment.

If my memory serves me correctly, I understand that imprisonment is still not available in Scotland because, we are told, there are sufficient civil remedies that can be used in Scotland. We have never had a satisfactory explanation about why imprisonment has been brought forward on Report. There is also the argument that prisoners are not subject to the poll tax, providing they have been convicted and have not been found "not guilty", having spent time on remand, during which time they will be responsible for the poll tax. It is a farce.

The Minister has said that the only people who will go to prison are those who have wilfully refused to pay, having had the means to do so. Those are important words. I have paraphrased the Minister's remarks, but by and large that is what he said.

It will be argued by Ministers that those who have definitely had the means to pay are those on income support. It will be alleged that the money to pay the 20 per cent. was included in their benefit. We all know that provision will be made only for the average 20 per cent. poll tax. We all know as well that an average will mean that the poll tax will be higher in some areas than in others. Some of the really poor—those on income support and subject to the means test—will gain if they are in a low poll tax area. They will receive payment for the average 20 per cent. poll tax. Others, however, will lose. Those who are on the lowest incomes on which the House has said that it is possible to exist will end up being even worse off if their local authorities are in above average poll tax areas. That will be the position in many Tory-controlled local authorities.

This is not a matter of the political complexion of the authority. In effect, the Government are saying, "You will have even less than the current means-tested benefit because we shall give you only the average sum for the 20 per cent. poll tax."

This is an issue that will have to be determined by the courts. If a person does not have the means to pay the full 20 per cent. because he has received only the average sum and he happens to live in a high poll tax area, how can it be held by the courts that he had the means to pay the poll tax? Surely no reasonable person could send anyone to prison in those circumstances. That is inconceivable.

This issue was never raised in Committee because it arose at the very time—virtually on the same day—that the guillotine was imposed on the Bill. We discussed attachment of earnings in Committee, and the guillotine fell when we started to discuss penalties. I am as guilty as any other member of the Committee because I did not ask about the attachment of benefit. The issue was not raised in Committee but it was taken up by someone in the Public Gallery, who talked to a Minister who was not especially pleased with the poll tax. A hint was given that there was a possibility of attachment of benefit. I estimate that there are about 4,000 words in the new schedule, and we can study it until we are blue in the face in an effort to find provisions on the attachment of benefit. Provisions on the attachment of earnings occupy one page of the schedule, and we all know that if an individual has earnings he must have an employer. That does not apply to anyone who is on income support or benefit. There is no employer and no earnings in the terms of a legal definition.

Paragraph 18, which is one of the shortest paragraphs in the schedule, reads:

> "Regulations under this Schedule may make, as regards the recovery of such a sum, provision equivalent to that included under Part II of this Schedule subject to any modifications the Secretary of State thinks fit."

Part II deals with attachment of earnings, and if someone does not have an employer the equivalent of earnings is benefit. We find in two lines towards the end of the schedule the link that provides for attachment of benefit. If I am wrong, I shall be corrected. I am stating my interpretation of the schedule on the attachment of benefit. I cannot find a link anywhere else.

This is outrageous and deceitful. Ministers are not prepared to write on the face of the Bill that attachment of social security benefit is a possibility under the Bill.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman could not have listened to my earlier observations. I said that the current provisions relate only to income from employment. For the reasons that I advanced, I said that they should be paralleled by provisions on the payment of income support. I added that we would be introducing amendments to the enforcement procedures at a later stage to give effect to that. There is no question of deceit or an attempt to conceal.

Mr. Rooker: Ministers were aware of this issue when we discussed penalties in Committee, and they said nothing about it. It was leaked that they had already decided to introduce the attachment of benefit. The massive schedule that is before us, which covers more than seven pages and covers almost everything, does not make that clear. Today is the first time that any Minister has spoken about attachment of benefit. If such a provision is to be placed on the face of the Bill in another place, why has it not been placed in the Bill in the House of Commons? Why has it not been included? Am I wrong in my assessment of paragraph 18?

The last thing of which I would accuse the Minister is deceit, but it is deceitful of the Government to proceed in this way. They do not have the guts to make their position clear and to introduce provisions to give effect to attachment of benefit so that we can seek to amend them.

[Mr. Rooker]

The amendments of the Labour and Liberal parties reflect only what we think the Bill means when it comes to attachment of benefit. We cannot be certain.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that an article in *The Independent* on 26 February suggested that the Cabinet Committee had already come to a decision and that that information had been kept from the Standing Committee that was considering the Bill because Ministers feared a hostile reaction to the proposal in this place. We must deduce—we have no facts—that Ministers know that, if they produced the explicit proposal that those on income support, especially in above average poll tax areas, should be liable to attachment of benefit and potentially to imprisonment, they would face a massive and additional hostile reaction. That is probably why we are hearing and seeing nothing specific in this place.

Mr. Dalyell: Has my hon. Friend taken into account the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe), and possibly my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), and I are rather inquisitive about the effect that the Government's proposal will have on Scottish legislation? This is the first that we have heard of the proposition. I hope that the Scottish position will be clarified. My hon. Friend will be aware that Scotland is one year ahead of England and Wales in this respect.

Mr. Rooker: The first I knew about the Government's proposal was when I read the article in *The Independent* to which the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) referred. It was never discussed in Committee. We spent 150 hours discussing the Bill in Committee and we shall have a massive five-day debate on Report. If the Government introduce a specific amendment in another place, I believe that they will probably have difficulty in getting it accepted.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is getting carried away on a point of absurdity. Surely he will agree that the important point is that the House should have the opportunity of debating the principle of the provision. Indeed, it has that opportunity. There are amendments that deal fairly and squarely with the principle. I have outlined to the House fairly and clearly the Government's intention in respect of attachment of benefit in respect of England and Wales. I said earlier that similar provisions will be made in respect of Scotland.

The Government have declared their intention clearly. It is absured for the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) to suggest that we have held back the detailed provisions for fear of a reaction. I have stated clearly the Government's intention. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) must know that it has not proved possible to introduce amendments in this place on all matters in respect of which we have clearly declared our intentions. There are some matters in respect of which it will be necessary to bring forward amendments in another place. The important thing is that the Government should declare their intention on this matter, which I have done, and that the House should have an opportunity to vote on the principle, which it will have.

Mr. Rooker: The length of that intervention proves my point. It is as simple as that. As the Minister knows, the House will probably not have an opportunity to vote on anything other than Government amendment No. 43 because the Bill has been guillotined. The chance of having anything other than a symbolic vote on this group of amendments, to which we object, is remote.

4.30 pm

Mr. Douglas: My hon. Friend is doing an excellent job for the Opposition. I wish to make it clear that the Scottish Act has no provision for going directly to income support payments. The Secretary of State for Scotland has 29 amendments that will go through on the basis of this Bill. It may be excusable for the dodos in the Department of the Environment who have not gone through the process, but it is inexcusable for the Secretary of State for Scotland, on the eve of elections in Scotland where the flagship is already on the statute book, not to have the guts to come forward with the provisions that the Minister for Local Government is asserting will operate in Scotland. Let us discuss those provisions on the Floor of the House before the May elections so that people in Scotland may know of the additional imposition in this noxious Act.

Mr. Rooker: My hon. Friend deserves an answer to that point at some time. I shall move on because many of my hon. Friends wish to speak on this aspect of the Bill.

Most of my other points can be put in the form of questions because they relate to the part of the Bill covered by the large group of Government amendments. Before the close of the debate, may we have clarification about the right of poll tax payers to pay by instalments? It is not clear from schedule 2, paragraph 2(2) (b), whether those with small bills—probably those on maximum rebate—will have the right to pay by instalments. We know that the regulations—much of the Bill will be administered by regulation—under schedule 2, paragraph 2(2) (b), will make payment by instalments the norm. There is no doubt that that will apply to the general population. That will lead undoubtedly to a massive increase in transactions. Many people now pay their rates in two halves, which they are entitled to do. I suspect that a few pay in one go. I know for a start that that will lead to a tenfold increase in transactions in Birmingham. Has the Minister or his colleagues had discussions with those who run the banking system in this country? The increased number of transactions will be gigantic and we should like to know whether the banking system will be able to cope.

The refusal of our constituents—that may be too strong a word—the non-co-operation of our constituents even to supply information, let alone pay the poll tax, can lead to a penalty—not a fine—of £50 imposed by the local treasurer. It will not involve going to the magistrates court to obtain a court order to impose the penalty. After a lack of co-operation the first time, a £200 penalty will be charged the second time.

We debated that aspect briefly in Committee because there was always the threat of the guillotine. I return, without apology, to the part of the Bill that used to be known as clause 5(7). It is now clause 6(8), which, deals with the setting up of the register. Clause 6(8) gives the registration officer a

"duty to compile and maintain a register in accordance with this Part".

It also includes the duty

"to take reasonable steps to obtain information for that purpose under the powers conferred on him."

That gobbledegook needs to be translated into plain man's English or Brummie English. Under regulations a local authority treasurer in England will be entitled to decide for himself—the authority of his council will not matter—that he will introduce a personal identity number made up from the date of birth and the initials of a person's name. If people then say, "Hang on a minute. The Minister has repeatedly said in Committee that it is not necessary to have numbers and dates of birth in Scotland or England in order to run the system and we will give our name and address and a promise to pay the poll tax but nothing else", he can fine them £50. If they refuse a second time, he can fine them £200. That can be imposed without people having an opportunity to go to court and argue the case. It will simply be added to their bill. Has the Minister given any more thought to that?

Is it proposed that applicants for income support or a means-tested benefit will be given, at the time they apply for income support, a poll tax rebate application form? I want to know whether that is proposed anywhere in the Bill or in regulations. If people refuse to fill in the poll tax rebate form, that will be taken as an indication of the fact that they are probably not registered for poll tax and the Department of Health and Social Security will then be obliged to report them to the poll tax registration officer. It has been put to me that that is proposed in the swathe of Government amendments. I cannot find it, and I should like to know whether that will be the case.

Will it be proposed that court procedures should be used for the arrestment of benefit—that is the case with wages—with the result that the benefit claimant will also be hit with legal costs? That point has to be taken on board. It has been suggested to me that that threat from the Department of the Environment is designed to encourage the DHSS to co-operate in deduction at source. It would be much cheaper and administratively convenient to put the 20 per cent. poll tax in income support and then deduct the poll tax at source. That would be much cheaper than chasing up the poor people who have to survive, under this Prime Minister, by sleeping with foil under their bedclothes. Is it intended to use the courts for the arrestment of benefit, and is that being used as a threat by the Department of the Environment to force the DHSS to co-operate?

Mr. Bermingham: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a problem if a man whose wife is working leaves his job and is deemed not to be entitled to unemployment benefit? If the wife continues with her job, he would not receive any benefits. Perhaps my hon. Friend will tell me what will be attached in his case.

Mr. Rooker: I am not a lawyer, but my understanding is that they would attach her earnings. Joint and several liability comes into operation and she is responsible. He has no income because, under the means test, her earnings put them above the level. Therefore, she is responsible for both poll taxes, and if she does not pay his full poll tax they will attach her earnings. We have had that drummed into us by Ministers who have made it clear that the poll tax is not an individual tax with universal accountability. Joint and several liability destroys the concept of universal accountability.

Mr. Bermingham: Perhaps my hon. Friend could assist me further. What happens if the parties have separated because of a domestic row but there is no court order and no legal separation? Is the separated or perhaps the deserted wife also expected to pay her husband's poll tax liabilities?

Mr. Rooker: Not if he is not living in the same household. We discussed in Committee that a couple might live under the same roof but not in the same household. Many of us in our surgeries hear about such situations where by all criteria a couple may be under the same roof but not in the same household. We were told in Committee that, if that could be proved, joint and several liability would not operate. We are creating a minefield. Who is to decide whether, for the purpose of attachment of benefit or earnings, a couple are in the same household? It is ludicrous and frightening. The problems that are likely to arise frighten me.

We cannot under the guillotine do justice to all the matters referred to in the amendments. I apologise to the House for having taken so long. I wanted to speak about warrants of commitment. I will ask my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), who will reply for the Opposition, to deal with that if time permits. We think that the Government's proposals are outrageous. We shall divide the House on principle because we are opposed to the concept of what the Government plan in this group of amendments.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) is a shrewd parliamentarian. If I remain a Member of Parliament for as long as he has been a Member, I hope that I shall become as adept as he is at operating in the wilderness of mirrors that represents Labour party policy. I sat in Committee for 147 hours with the hon. Member for Perry Barr. He told us that he had not been prepared to come to the Second Reading debate without a policy, or to the House of Commons unclothed, but he is still unclothed and without a policy. On Monday he found my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) bathing in the pool of self-indulgence. The hon. Gentleman promptly stole his clothes and is now sliding into the waters of political opportunism.

Once again the hon. Gentleman has regaled the House with an incredible speech. He spent the larger part of it lecturing my hon. and learned Friend about his duty, although my hon. and learned Friend has made his intentions absolutely clear. There is no intention to disguise anything from Parliament, and the hon. Member for Perry Barr spent the greater part of his speech erecting a great fabrication. His voice rose with false anger. The real thing that he was trying to hide from the House was the comment made by his hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields). The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) has left his seat, but he, backed by the hon. Member for Broadgreen, advocated a policy of civil disobedience. I am glad that the hon. Member for Perry Barr is listening. Will he dissociate himself and the Labour party from that policy? I am prepared to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Rooker: There is no doubt about it. We have made it clear that we are in favour of obeying the law, even though we oppose it and will repeal it at the first opportunity. We will not co-operate in its implementation,

[Mr. Rooker]

but the money has to be collected to pay the salaries of local government employees. The point I was making was that it is not within the competence of a political party to advocate non-compliance in the hope that the authority can obey that policy, because the authority is not in charge. I pointed to the contradiction in doing that, leading to people having their earnings attached, being arrested and ending up in prison, and then going round at the next local elections asking people to vote Labour. That is not on.

Mr. Leigh: We are back to the wilderness of mirrors. The hon. Gentleman is not prepared to say in plain, simple language, which the electorate can understand, that Parliament is supreme, that he may not like what Parliament is doing, but that Parliament has a right to legislate and that Liverpool and the London boroughs have a duty to carry out what Parliament wants. The hon. Gentleman is hiding behind the false screen which he has erected that local authorities have no discretion in the matter. Local authorities always have a certain amount of discretion to carry out not just the letter but the spirit of the law. The hon. Gentleman is saying that he is prepared to condone action by the Labour local authorities to thwart the spirit of the law.

4.45 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): If the hon. Gentleman cares so much about respect for the law and the authority of Parliament, his hon. Friends should have refrained from carrying out the Scottish legislation. They paid no heed to what they were doing in Scotland. In some respects they realised what they had done only when the matters came up in the English legislation. It would help people to have more respect for Parliament if, when replying to questions from Opposition Members, the Government gave honest replies and did not attempt to deceive the House and the people.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East) *rose*——

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) may make his point now; I see that he is on his feet.

Mr. Barnes: Is there not an unholy alliance between the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields), in that the proposal that there should be imprisonment for non-payment of poll tax was introduced in Committee by the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle and withdrawn when there was agreement from the Minister that an amendment would be tabled? The hon. Gentleman introduced a proposal that would have produced a martyrs' charter. People would have used it against entirely unjustified legislation. The hon. Gentleman should examine his position as well as discussing that of my hon. Friend the Member for Broadgreen.

Mr. Leigh: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman intervened. Only this week I read in the *Market Rasen Mail* that he had told the local Labour party that I wanted to put people in prison and that in Committee I had proposed an amendment for that purpose. Nothing could be further from the truth. I am delighted to have the opportunity to put matters into their proper context.

On behalf of the Rating and Valuation Association, in which I have no financial or other interest, I suggested to my hon. and learned Friend the Minister that the present rating legislation contains a last ditch device by which local authorities can commit to prison people who wilfully refuse to pay their rates, despite the fact that they have the resources to do so. I did not propose any amendment. The Minister simply said that that was right. He proposed to bring forward his own amendment on Report. Those are the facts.

I want to return the point to the hon. Member for Broadgreen. Is it not profoundly anti-social and anti-socialist that people who have the means to do so but wilfully refuse, for any reason, political or otherwise, to pay their dues to society should get away with it? Is that what the Labour party wants?

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Under the legislation, who will decide whether someone has the means to pay?

Mr. Leigh: If the hon. Gentleman, like myself or the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham), had spent any time in magistrates courts he would know that magistrates do not send to prison for non-payment of rates people who do not have the means to pay. They imprison only those who wilfully refuse to pay. The hon. Member for St. Helens, South is in his seat. He is an experienced lawyer. If I am misleading the House, he should rise and say so.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I remind the House that interventions only take up the time of other hon. Members. In deciding who should catch the eye of the Chair, the Chair will take into account those who intervene.

Mr. Leigh: I draw my remarks to a conclusion by saying that when the glossy packaging is taken away there is revealed the true nature and the militant heart of the Labour party—resist Parliament, resist democracy, and resort to civil disobedience.

Mr. Bermingham: I did not rise to the bait of the trite intervention of the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh). The hon. Gentleman should know, if he casts his mind back to his days in the magistrates courts, that the magistrates did not always examine in depth the ability to pay and wilful refusal to pay. Regrettably, a person who could not keep up the rate of repayment ordered was incarcerated.

I was amazed that the Minister for Local Government, who is an honourable and learned man, had forgotten so much about the court system. He is in a world of unreality.

Mr. Howard: I never knew as much about the courts as the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Bermingham: That means that the Minister knew nothing at all, because I know precious little.

For years we have been trying to take imprisonment out of the system of enforcement of payment of civil debt. The prisons, rotten as they are, do not have room for the people who will fail to pay their poll tax. One can imagine the conversation between the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Home Secretary. The Secretary of

State for the Environment would say, "We have a measure into which we shall put a penal clause. Is there any room in your prisons?" The Home Secretary would reply, "No, I do not have any room." It will cost more than a whole year's poll tax to keep a person in prison for only a week.

Why must there be this penal clause? The Minister has said that only 400 people went to prison last year for non-payment of rates. He should not mislead the House. Many more people will be liable to pay the poll tax than were ever ratepayers. Many more poll tax provisions than domestic rates provisions are the subject of penal sanctions, Many more people will be involved under this legislation.

The new schedule is iniquitous. We have already seen the beginning of the problems. There is stage one: if a person does not pay, the authorities will try distress warrants. Local authorities throughout the land are levelling distress warrants against ratepayers who do not pay their rates. In stage two, there will be attachment. One can understand that system being applied if a person is in work, but there is a problem, which the Minister has either forgotton or about which he or his advisers do not know enough. There is great variation in the petty sessional divisions. The way in which people are treated by magistrates varies enormously depending on whether they live in a shire county or in an inner city area. I have known magistrates in the shire counties who think it rather a joke that a person has not paid his rates, so they levy payment at about £1 a week. I have seen persons sitting in judgment in inner city areas order payment of £5 a week out of the £25 a week, or whatever, received by the unemployed. That is vicious. Will there be guidelines on the way in which the poll tax is to be levied? There may be a high poll tax in one area and low tax in another. How will the deductions be made?

There is the other side to the coin: social security benefits will be the subject of deduction. I raised the same matter recently in respect of fines imposed by the courts under the provisions of the Criminal Justice Bill. The Home Office people told me that social security payments cannot be attached to recoup fines. As the House will be aware, our prisons are full and we have been trying to get fine defaulters out of prison. Apparently that cannot be done by those means. Why can benefits be attached for non-payment of the poll tax but not for penal fines?

Will the Minister confirm his undertaking in respect of people in prison on remand? Apparently, if they are convicted, they pay no poll tax but if they are acquitted they are liable to pay it. These days people are in prison on remand for so long that it may be cheaper for them to plead guilty, and not have to pay the poll tax, than to plead not guilty, be acquitted and pay the poll tax. That is absolute lunacy.

I asked my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) about the position of a wife whose husband lost his job. This legislation is becoming a lawyer's paradise, and I declare my interest as a barrister. Can hon. Members imagine a court of law and a matrimonial dispute when one of the wife's complaints, which led to the husband being thrown out, was that she had to pay his poll tax because he had lost his job, and he had clocked her one? Where on earth are we going? We have created a legal minefield.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): The minefield becomes even greater because, after the wife has left the man—because he clocked her one for what he did or did not do with the poll tax—she will still be liable for his poll tax because of joint and several liability.

Mr. Bermingham: My hon. Friend makes a useful point, which I shall not pursue, lest I make a remark that will get me into even more trouble. We all know the problem.

It was fascinating to turn over the pages of amendment No. 73 and find the charging orders in paragraph 8. Oh, how sweet. There is a lovely get-out if a person owns his house. There is no need to bother with attachment of earnings—tell the boss not to bother—and no point in sending the man to prison. Instead, a charging order can be put on the property. For those with properties, there is no imprisonment. For those who do not have properties, there is imprisonment. For those with properties, there is no imprisonment. Are we not a sweet little nation and do we not have a sweet little Government?

When one is at the bottom of the pile all the worst things happen. What about those a little further up the pile? What about the percentage of home ownership? What happens if there are tenants in common, co-owners who are not married? The house is to be charged, but against which share? How is the charge levied? Does that put a block on the person who is not liable for the charging order? Again, there is a lovely minefield for the lawyers. It has been created, regrettably, by a Minister who is a lawyer but who said that he did not know as much about it as I do.

I have had only the time since the amendments were published to look at them. I have mentioned just a few of the little problems that I found in the new schedule. When the real professionals get at it, they will create a morass of questions. Once again, the Government will have rendered a piece of legislation a litigation paradise but will have done nothing for the ordinary person. The penal clauses can be summed up beautifully: a person with a house and a job will not go to gaol. However, when a person has a rented place and not much furniture and he is at the bottom of the pile, may not have a job and may be on benefit, the authorities will not waste a moment on him. They will not go to that expense and trouble. Magistrates courts are inconsistent. That is why I ask the Minister to produce some guidelines for consistency, because they will not bother. They will just lock a person up.

Then the silly situation will arise as a result of which it will cost more in a week to keep someone in a police cell —because the authorities will have run out of prison places, as they always do—than it would cost to collect the poll tax off that person for two or three years. At the moment, it costs £1,000 a week to keep a person in a prison cell.

Perhaps the Minister will have the courage to take away Government amendment No. 73, bury it and come back with some better ideas.

5 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes: I want to start exactly where the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) left off, but I shall address my remarks to the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) because it seems to me that there is no logic in the Government's proposals. Yesterday the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle argued that, whatever else we did, we

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

should seek to be logical and consistent. As he is a lawyer, I ask him to think about the logic of the proposals before us.

According to the logic of the Government's proposals, there will be three penalties for people who do not pay. First, one's earnings may be attached; secondly, one's goods may be the subject of a distress warrant and may therefore be sold; thirdly, and most severe, one may be sent to prison. We are grateful that the Minister has made it clear that he intends that the amendments ensuring that those penalties will apply to all people, whether earning a wage or receiving benefits from the state, will be part of the Bill.

When the Bill was originally published, it did not refer to imprisonment. Imprisonment for non-payment of the poll tax does not apply in Scotland. However, imprisonment will be imposed on anyone, unless the amendment tabled by the Labour party or that of my party is accepted. It will be up to the courts to decide who will be imprisoned. Given the injustice that will follow, all hon. Members should think carefully about whether to support the amendments even if a schedule has to be brought into the Bill.

Although I do not like the implications, especially in respect of the schedule, it is not as bad as it might have been. When the matter was raised in Committee—the Minister, the hon. Member for Gainsborough* and Horncastle and others will know that I was not a member of that Committee because I was sitting on the Housing Bill Committee at the time—it was originally proposed that, in some cases, no discretion should be available to the courts. An amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) on that point was debated. At that stage, it was conceded that discretion should be available for the courts, so that there would be a more flexible approach towards those who default. That is right because justice must always be tempered with mercy by those who administer it. That system allows judges, not juries, to pass sentence in this country. We all want to uphold that system.

I intervened in the Minister's speech on the matter of phraseology. There has been a change and a penalty will be available if it can be shown by the prosecuting authority that non-payment is due to wilful refusal or culpable neglect. The problem is that the illogicality remains. The hon. Member for St. Helens, South was right. The earnings of those who earn a wage or salary can be attached. They will not go to prison because there will be no need. The money will be recoupable by an attachment order. For those who have property, that property can be taken away. They will not need to go to prison because the less severe remedy will be available to those seeking to enforce it. Who will be likely to face the reality of imprisonment? It will not be the person who is earning, even if he is not earning much. It will not be the person with property and goods, even if they do not amount to very much. It will be the person who has neither.

Mr. Leigh: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment. The hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members know that people who have no goods, no regular income, apart from that provided by the state, and often no home appear in the courts throughout the country every day. They appear regularly on all sorts of charges in magistrates courts and they are often queuing up to be dealt with first thing in the morning, having spent the night in a cell.

Those people will inevitably face imprisonment because they have no earnings that can be attached and no goods that they can hand over. Those people will be liable to go to gaol. Who will the bulk of them be? They will be the people on the most pathetic incomes and those with no homes. The homeless will face imprisonment in the already overcrowded prisons. Those who are least likely to be able to contribute will be sent to prison as a result of the Bill.

Mr. Leigh: That is an important point and, if I put the wrong reflection on it, perhaps my hon. and learned Friend the Minister will correct me. As I understand it, the purpose of the Bill is not to catch that sort of person with no means. The Bill aims to catch, for example, a company director who wilfully refuses to pay rates and puts property into the hands of his company.

Mr. Hughes: That is an important point, but the facility to deal with the company director is there. The attachment of earnings ability is there. One can deal with somebody with a large amount of money or three homes—the Minister appears to think that many of us have three homes—by dealing with their goods. The company director can be dealt with. There must be a backdrop if, for some reason, the company director manages to avoid anybody paying him anything in a visible or tangible way.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: I shall give way in a moment.

The people who will be in the front line, because they have no earnings to attach and no goods on which a warrant of distress can be executed, will be the homeless. They will be locked up. It is a funny way to solve the crisis of homelessness in Britain by putting people in prison.

Mr. Boateng: Given the Government's great difficulty in catching, convicting and sending to prison any company director for insider trading, is it really likely that they will be able to capture and imprison one for evading the poll tax?

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman makes a generally well-agreed and self-evident point. The Government increasingly add laws to penalise people with the least money. The people who escape most and have most left to play with financially are those with most money.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Does the hon. Gentleman not understand that the sanction of imprisonment will not be used to pursue a poor person who is unable to pay? The courts would not take the view that that was a proper thing to do. The sanction of imprisonment would be used for somebody who wilfully refused to pay, even when he had the capacity to pay, and who, having had the money, loses it in some way and wilfully defies the law. That is the point of that ultimate sanction. It is likely to be used only in those circumstances. Those are the only circumstances in which it is used currently.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman would be right if the only definition given by the Government was wilful neglect or refusal, but that is not the case. The definition also includes culpable neglect.

In an earlier intervention, the Minister said that amendments will be introduced to allow an attachment of earnings to be made in respect of people who are entirely dependent on income support. My borough will pay a higher than average poll tax, as will many other boroughs and some districts. There will be a gap between the amount my constituents receive in income support and their poll tax bill because they will get at most an 80 per cent. rebate and then the average amount of the differential rebated and paid to them. They will not have money from the state to pay their bill. That is all they will receive because the social security system will provide them with no more.

The Minister refused to say that in those cases the court could not send those people to prison because of "culpable neglect"—the Government's phrase from earlier legislation. The Government want to go after those people—this was clear from the leak in *The Independent* on 26 February —because they are terrified that if people on income support do not have their income attached, they will use the money from the state for other purposes—for example, to pay an electricity or gas bill. So those people are liable to be guilty of culpable neglect and to go inside. That is the inequity of the system.

There is no guarantee that somebody who has not a penny piece left of the income that the Government—the meanest to the poor in my lifetime—say is the minimum necessary to survive will not go to prison because he cannot afford to pay the poll tax.

Mr. Butterfill: Can we surmise what may be meant by "culpable neglect"? If a person receives money in social security, repeatedly uses it on beer and betting shops, and time and again does not pay his bill because he has wasted the money, what do we do to bring home to him the reality that something must be done about that conduct?

Mr. Hughes: I shall not be drawn down that road. When our society has finished dealing with the money wasted on beer, betting shops and the rest by people on enormous salaries, it can turn to those who have £30 a week to live on. Then we can see whether we can act as judges on their spending.

The provision is clear. Apparently, the Cabinet Committee decided in February that people should be prevented from using their income, even if theirs is the lowest income in society, in such a way as to avoid a poll tax bill for which they will not have income from the state to pay. That is the inequity of the system. It is a disgrace for a civilised society to allow the best off massive reductions in their bills—the Prime Minister and her colleagues on the Front Bench will have massive reductions in their bills—and to allow people with nothing to be imprisoned because they cannot pay.

Mr. Wilshire: I wish to focus on three points that have been raised in the debate. First, the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) referred to what I regard as wild claims about the administrative burden that will be imposed, especially for collection and enforcement. Secondly, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) attempted to water down the provisions for enforcement. Thirdly, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) made outrageous points about the Labour-backed campaign to frustrate the collection of the community charge when the Bill reaches the statute book.

It seems right that somebody should say something about the administrative side of this issue. Amendments Nos. 55 and 56 both sit within schedules 8 and 11, which deal with administration. They need to be put into context, because wild claims are made about the administrative problems of collection and enforcement. It is claimed that the cost will be vastly more than the present cost, and that to run the new system we shall need a huge army of extra council staff.

My 11 years in local government, five of which were as leader of an authority, have taught me to treat such claims with the most enormous pinch of salt. If one tries to conduct a calm study, as I have tried to do in the past, one concludes that to double the staff is likely to cost less than double the cost. Yet I have seen reports which claim to be accurate and calm which suggest that the cost will be three or four times as much, or even five or six times as much. Those are some of the crazy allegations being made about the cost of collection and enforcement.

We would do well to ask why these wild claims are being made. Clearly, some are politically inspired. If people can be frightened about the cost of a proposal, they may oppose it. Some claims have been based on wholly incorrect assumptions and have been made by people who have not taken time to study the Bill in detail or to get to know the intricacies of local government. I have seen council reports that claim for the whole future staff numbers that will probably be needed only to start the system and will certainly not be needed to keep it running.

5.15 pm

I do not see any need to apologise for the additional cost and for saying that collection and enforcement might need additional staff. There is no need to apologise for that, because fairness costs money. If Opposition Members wish to argue that only the cost of the system matters, perhaps they should advocate highway robbery to collect local government money, because that must be the cheapest way to get money from people.

Mr. Dalyell: This is not a question of reports. In my case it is a question of talking to officials in Lothian and central region. They are staid, serious assessors, who are faced with the job. Scotland is a year ahead in this respect and that is the problem that we face. I assure the House that the assessors and others who must deal with this matter will not employ people needlessly.

Mr. Wilshire: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. I have not had the good fortune to study those figures in detail, but I have looked at many others and will be delighted to look at those figures to see whether any of my points about incorrect assumptions and people building empires are valid. I shall happily look at the figures if the hon. Gentleman supplies them, but I cannot comment on them if I have not seen them.

The hon. Member for Perry Barr spoke about enforcement. There is no need to be coy about the provisions in the amendments on this score. I have not heard Opposition Members mention any need for us to ensure that those who keep the law and pay, often with difficulty, are protected by Parliament. Those who do not keep the law should not be allowed to get away with it and to undermine the principles that drive most British people,

[Mr. Wilshire]

so there must be proper enforcement and adequate penalties. The means of extracting money from such people is not enough when they seek to defy the law of the land.

Mrs. Fyfe: Would the hon. Gentleman care to comment on what has been happening in Strathclyde region in the past few weeks? The poll tax registrar has been acting against the clear instructions of the law, in that he has sent poll tax forms to householders with an accompanying postcard which says that they have three days in which to return the form instead of, as the law clearly states, 21 days. There will also be 21 days in the English and Welsh legislation. Would the hon. Gentleman not be worried if that occurred in England and Wales, and would he not advocate steps to prevent that throughout Britain?

Mr. Wilshire: That matter can be dealt with adequately by the registrar's employers.

Mrs. Fyfe: This point was raised on an interim interdict with the sheriff in Strathclyde region, and her judgment was that the matter was between the registrar and the Government, because for these purposes the Government, not Strathclyde regional council, are the employer. That is why I am addressing the question to the hon. Gentleman. Otherwise, I would address it to Strathclyde regional council.

Mr. Wilshire: It is fascinating getting lost in the details of the Scottish system, but I was trying to address myself to the Bill and not to what is or is not happening in Strathclyde.

It is proper that a range of sanctions should be available in trying to enforce collection of the community charge. Non-payers are not represented by one particular group of people who can all be dealt with in the same way. There seem to be two groups among those who do not pay. There are the "can't" payers and the "won't" payers. Yesterday, I and others were discussing rebates and exemptions as they apply to the first group and we do not want to return to that, but it is important to understand that the "can't" payers of this country, who have genuine problems with their ability to pay, need help. I am sure that the Government will address themselves to that issue, so that such people can be eliminated from the system by being helped through income support and other measures.

The people to whom we must address ourselves are the "won't" payers. They must not be allowed to sponge off others. As I said earlier, when it comes to wilful refusal, it is more than a matter of finding a means of extracting the money that is owed. There needs to be some mechanism for enforcing a penalty against those who try to take a free ride on the back of society.

The third point made by the hon. Member for Broadgreen was about campaigning to defy the law. I suspect that the pressures to water down the enforcement mechanism are a means of trying to help that campaign. If there are no real penalties for defying the law, there is very little risk in withholding the money that is owed, other than that of having it taken away at some stage in the future.

If the campaign to defy the law is successful, two very nasty things will happen. First, local government itself will be harmed. If an unknown number of people do not pay, how will any council be able to organise its finances, make plans, or produce budgets? As a result, services will suffer. It is as well to understand that those who advocate a campaign of defiance are arguing that services should be reduced in their communities.

Complaints were made earlier that powers would be taken away from local authorities if they did not observe the law. The Opposition Front Bench complained that treasurers had powers which councillors cannot exercise. I was invited to rise to my feet and say that it would serve councils right if that happened to them. I am now happy to say that for the record. If councils defy the law, they must not be surprised if Parliament takes steps to ensure that services improve and that proper care is taken of the local population. That is the second thing that will happen.

If the campaign to undermine the rule of law is pursued, all of us will suffer. The Opposition Front Bench tried to wriggle out of saying whether the voice of Labour Back Benchers was that of the Labour party. I believe that earlier this afternoon we heard the authentic voice of the militant Left. We heard what really is going on. There is a cancer that is gnawing at our way of life. It is not just the Mace that those people wish to smash; they wish to smash also our way of life.

Mr. Boateng: Absolute rubbish!

Mr. Wilshire: If it is absolute rubbish, I look forward to hearing the Labour party disowning what was said earlier this afternoon.

In debating these amendments, it is high time that we exposed the exaggerations of those who claim that administration of the system will get out of hand. It is high time that we made clear the fact that there will be a complete range of sanctions against those who wilfully do not pay. Above all, now is the time to shine the spotlight on the Left, which is determined to defy the law and destroy our way of life.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): At the end of the Spartacus revolt in Rome, the poor and depressed who took part were crucified in their thousands along the roads leading to the capital.

Mr. Leigh: They broke the law.

Mr. Fraser: They broke the law in wanting their own freedom. I rather agree with that breach of the law, but if the hon. Gentleman believes in oppression, then he must follow his own conscience.

In a token way, the Government are out to crucify the poor and the oppressed, certainly of the borough that I represent. There are about 90,000 ratepayers in Lambeth. When the poll tax is introduced, about 190,000 people will be liable to pay it. The number of people now receiving income support—or social security, as it was last week—represents about 25 per cent. of the population of my borough, or about one person in four. So just under 50,000 people liable to poll tax in Lambeth will be receiving income support. They will be entirely reliant on the state for their income. They are the people who, until 1 April this year, when they were liable for rates, paid no rates at all. About 50,000 people will now have to pay the poll tax.

Secondly, the average burden that people will bear in my borough will be twice the present level. The projected poll tax of £547 per person per year is almost exactly double the average burden of rates, although for the

poorer members of the community the burden of poll tax will be, not untypically, 400 per cent. greater than the burden they now bear.

I turn next to the 50,000 people who will be paying one fifth of their poll tax in cash from income support. The nature of the crucifixion will be that those people will suffer much more agony than they do at present in managing their personal affairs. They will feel more wretched and stressed because the poll tax will be greater than the compensation they now receive under social security arrangements; they will be more impoverished than they are at present. To do that to 50,000 people is a kind of financial crucifixion, of which the Government will be guilty.

The Minister told the House this afternoon—although this provision has been slipped into the new schedule—that it is possible that not all such people will go to prison, but they may find that their income support is attached. When housing benefit was introduced, for sensible reasons and in the order to ensure that vast arrears of rent did not accrue, as happened among many poorer boroughs, the arrangements operated in such a way that the whole of the housing benefit payable to the recipient went in settlement of his rent and rates. As a result, at least there is not the level of rent and rates arrears that there was with the previous system, under which supplementary benefit was paid to the recipient, who in turn was meant to pay his rates of council rent direct.

We are now returning to a system where recipients will be paid some compensation for the payment of poll tax. However, the 50,000 impoverished members of my borough will find that if they do not pay, they will be taken to the magistrates court. The costs of that action will inevitably be added to the amount owing. If they still cannot pay and are found guilty of wilful refusal, their income support will be attached. We shall return to the same point as before, where people will be more wretched, more agonised and more impoverished than when the system started.

I represent a borough and a constituency where the level of crime is far too high. It is often exaggerated, but even so it is very significant and substantial. Since my election, I have tried to work with Governments—whether my party has been in government or in opposition—and with my local police force and the community to reduce the level of crime, because I consider crime to be an invasion of people's civil rights. It has not always been an easy ride for me, particularly representing an area such as Brixton.

5.30 pm

It is almost a cliché that, to ensure that we operate against crime to achieve a more stable and tranquil community, we must try to get the community working with the so-called forces of law and order—the local police force, the local authority and so on. We must work cohesively to battle against crime, and in other respects to have that more stable and tranquil community. Graffiti and anti-social behaviour, for instance, lower the quality of people's lives in an area that is already very much impoverished.

What will the poll tax do? It will mean that those 50,000 people are much more likely to find themselves sent to prison for non-payment than under the present system. I say that for two reasons. First, those who may now be candidates for prison at least have a number of hurdles to cross before they get there. There must be wilful refusal to pay; and, if they are very poor, until now they will have been receiving certificated housing benefit, in which case the problem will not have arisen in the first place.

Secondly, if those people are not receiving certificated housing benefit, it is likely that they will own personal property of some kind, or they may have bank accounts or earnings that can be attached. Many of my constituents are both in receipt of housing benefit and owners of property. Of course, they will not be receiving benefit for much longer, because of the £6,000 rule. But we are now introducing a new class of people. I am talking about the people—nearly 50,000 of them—who will not have certificated benefit or personal property, many of whom will be paying the tax for the first time. Those 50,000 are much more likely to be adjudged by the courts as wilfully refusing to pay their poll tax.

If Conservative Members think that magistrates take a benign view of refusal to pay, they are mistaken. A good many people are sent to prison for that reason. Although some of them at present have the money, or can find it somehow, the new group of 50,000 candidates for prison do not fall into that category.

Who will have to chase those people around the estates and the streets? The very people with whom the community has been trying to work for the last decade to increase co-operation between the police and the community, and thus to combat one cause of the lower quality of our lives.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South) *rose—*

Mr. Fraser: I think that it would be unfair to accept interruptions. Many hon. Members wish to speak.

We already live in a society that contains refuseniks. Very poor people do no always pay their television licences, or car tax, and often they do not even pay the fines imposed on them when they are unlucky enough to find themselves in the magistrates courts. Not a few people, but a great cohort in an inner city London borough, will be pushed up against the police, who will have to act in a civil role to enforce a law that is being introduced by the Government in a most oppressive way.

The last poll tax, in 1381, prompted a civil revolt. I do not wish to encourage or prophesy civil trouble on the streets. I have experienced quite enough of that already in my constituency, but if there is one thing that could fracture the co-operation with my police force and others working for a stable and tranquil community—one course that is likely to undermine that co-operation, and put thousands of people at risk of imprisonment, financial penalties, degradation and ultimately criminalisation—it is the legislation, and the amendments to it, that we are discussing. If the Government want a society in upheaval, they are certainly going the right way about it.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): When the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) referred to the lack of logic in the Government's proposals to reintroduce the ability to send people to prison for non-payment of rates, he could have extended his argument to the lack of consistency in the approach to sentencing between the Department of the Environment and the Home Secretary.

When the Bill was going through its Committee stage, the Criminal Justice Bill was also in Committee. On that Bill, we discussed report after report and survey after

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survey that clearly demonstrated that we were sending far too many people to prison. We were discussing the principles and criteria on which we decide which offenders merit imprisonment. The time to review whether rate defaulters should be sent to prison is now, in our current debate. If we are to avoid more and more people being sent to prison, that inevitably means that we must look at the offences for which the courts can sentence them. I remind the House that in 1987 the average prison population in England and Wales was 49,000, and the prison capacity was 42,000. Prisons in England and Wales are now overcrowded to the extent of 7,000 prisoners. The hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) made a clear and valid point about that.

The Government give the impression that they seek value for money in these matters, yet they seem to have conveniently forgotten that it costs £250 a week to keep a person in prison, whereas, for example, it costs £14 a week to impose a community service order. Would it not be better for the Government, rather than thinking of sending people to prison for rate default, to consider ways in which those people can benefit the community, at much less cost? The Government should certainly accept an argument that offers them cost benefits.

I was much taken with the hypothetical discussion cited by the hon. Member for St. Helens, South between the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Home Secretary. I can imagine the Home Secretary, discussing the matter with his colleague—perhaps on the way from a Cabinet meeting—saying, "Be careful about this proposal, because you may well be reminded of the speech that I made to magistrates in London at the beginning of the year."

As the discussion is hypothetical, I may as well remind the House of what the Home Secretary told the south-east London branch of the Magistrates Association on 15 January this year. He said:

> "The Court of Appeal has long made it clear that courts should not sentence on a purely punitive or deterrent basis without regard to the costs or the individual characteristics of the offender. We must try to ensure that custody is used only when the offence is so serious that a sentence outside prison would bring the system into disrepute".

It seems to me that in the Bill the Government are giving the courts powers to do the opposite.

Apart from considerations of prison overcrowding and the undesirability of increasing the prison population, we should also consider the principle behind the Government's proposal. The Government have disregarded the consensus view within the legal profession, and, increasingly, among judges, that we should not send people to prison for this sort of thing. Sending people to prison should be retained for the serious offences that we all abhor. All the organisations concerned with offenders and people who continually offend believe we should not send people to prison for minor technical offences. We are discussing a civil not a criminal matter, yet we are going in the opposite direction.

The Government's approach could lead to absurdities; there are already some. Take, for example, a man who is ordered to pay maintenance to his wife but refuses to do so. A court may send him to prison for that. Year after year he may go to prison for non-payment of maintenance, but his wife will not get the maintenance—it is wiped off the slate. That is absurd and helps no one—neither the wife nor society. Like all other countries in western Europe, we must move away from the idea that we must send people to prison for non-payment in these matters.

The Government did not intend to include this provision originally. Had they intended to do so, it would have been in the Bill. The provision has been included because of what Conservative Members have said about rebellions that might take place in parts of England. That does not help the millions of people who will pay the poll tax and may fall into difficulties in certain circumstances. Everyone will be caught in the net and tarred with the same brush.

I sincerely urge the Government, on the basis of consistency and logic and because we are moving away from the sort of arguments the Government are using, to consider accepting amendment (a) to amendment No. 73.

Mr. Butterfill: Many of the arguments that we have heard from the Opposition have exaggerated the problem. The hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser)—I know his constituency well—suggested that there would be a large extension of the intrusion of the police into the affairs of certain members of the community in his constituency. To a degree, that may be so, but there is the problem that a minority in certain sections of society consider themselves above the law and somehow outside the general principles that govern society. They think that they do not need to comply with the law.

That is where we come to the principle of wilful refusal. Anyone who has had any experience of trying to collect debts from those who are determined not to have them collected from them, even though they possess the resources, will know of the difficulties that face officers of local authorities who are charged with such responsibilities. I shall give an illustration of that from my personal experience.

When I was driving home from the House late one night a couple of years ago, a gentleman drove a car out from a side road into the side of my car. He said, "Oh unhappy day," and proceeded to be helpful. He gave me his name and address and the details of his insurance company and admitted that the accident was entirely his fault. I assumed that a claim on his insurance company would mean I would be able to recover my loss, but I am afraid that I was mistaken. I discovered that my insurance company was not going to try to recover from the man because it was a waste of time. The company said it would delete my no-claims bonus. I said that that was ridiculous; the man was insured and I knew his insurance company. My insurance company said that, although he had cover, he had not claimed against his insurance company, and unless he made a claim against it, it would not meet the liability. My only recourse was to take action against him personally. My company said that if I could recover the money from him, it would reinstate my no-claims bonus. I proceeded to try to do just that. I went to the local court in Battersea which gave me judgment against the chap, and then the problem of trying to recover the money started.

Time after time I used all sorts of devices to recover the money, but all in vain. I sent bailiffs to his home. He kept moving and when they eventually found him they discovered that nothing in his home belonged to him—it all belonged to relatives or others, so there was nothing for them to take. They said that this was a common problem

that happened all the time. The police agreed that the man's lifestyle showed that he had plenty of money, but said that I was wasting my time trying to get it from him.

5.45 pm

In the end I abandoned the attempt. That is the sort of person whose actions constitute wilful refusal, and the provision in the Bill is intended to deal with such behaviour. It relates to the right of a public authority to recover money that is due to it.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said that he did not like the extension of culpable neglect. When I pressed him on that and asked how one would deal with someone who repeatedly received money from social services and had money with which to discharge his debt, yet used it on beer and betting shops, the hon. Gentleman castigated me and said that lots of rich people spend their money on beer and betting shops. He asked me why, if that was good for them, it was not good for such people. My response, from a sedentary position, was that the rich people were spending their own money, not public money.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) wanted such people to be dealt with. Will he tell the House how he proposed to have them dealt with? Does my hon. Friend recall the hon. Gentleman's words?

Mr. Butterfill: If the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey cares to intervene, I shall be glad to give way.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Enforcement of attachment of earnings and distraint of goods are ways of dealing with these sorts of people, and imprisonment, if it is available at all, should be available for those who wilfully refuse to pay. If someone wilfully refuses to pay, when he could do so—the category of person to which the hon. Gentleman has referred—that is a different issue from that which the Government have addressed.

Mr. Butterfill: The hon. Gentleman has not been listening to what I have said. Attachment of earnings for people who are not earning and distraint, which I found impossible to enforce despite the support of the courts and the bailiffs, are not adequate remedies in every case. From the discussions that I have had with bailiffs, I fear that this is a frequent problem.

I suggest that there are people who may not be wilfully refusing but who so manage their affairs as repeatedly to fail to use money being given to them by the state and the taxpayer to discharge their debts for that purpose—they waste it on other things. There will come a point when some sanction must be brought to bear on them to convince them that they need to comply with the ordinary standards of our society.

Mr. Simon Hughes: This is an important point. There can come a time—it can be prescribed in regulations—when certain activities, such as failure to answer requests for information or to fill in forms, will be deemed wilful refusal.

Mr. Butterfill: At least we are getting somewhere with the hon. Gentleman. Of itself, wilful refusal is inadequate. Culpable neglect will be used sparingly. The court will not use it other than in extremis, when it believes that somebody is behaving quite unreasonably. At the end of the day, there must be a sanction that persuades people that they must behave in the way in which 99 per cent. of civilised society behaves.

Ms. Mowlam: Many Opposition Members wish to speak in the debate, so my remarks will be brief.

One difficulty that we have in speaking to the amendments is that which we faced in Committee—the lack of information and factual detail from the Government. It is like pulling teeth. For every bit of information that we want, we must pull all the time so that we may have a sensible, open, honest, rational debate. The charitable interpretation of the difficulty is that, as the Minister said when opening the debate, the answer is not yet available and that it is truly legislation on the hoof. As we have heard, the maximum amount that will be attached to benefits to get money back has not been decided.

The uncharitable interpretation is that the Government have made a specific, concrete decision to make it difficult for people in the House and outside to know exactly what has happened. To support that argument, one has only to refer to the document that was leaked from the Prime Minister's Office. It said about the poll tax:

> "Careful thought would need to be given to the timing of any announcement of a change to the proposed community charge rebate. It would be desirable to avoid giving precise details until after the debate on April 18th."

That is the uncharitable explanation, but, in view of what has been leaked from the Prime Minister's Office, perhaps it matches the reality of what we are dealing with. The Minister for Local Government said that we could discuss the principle—the principle is there—but we do not need the specifics. I have never heard a more ludicrous, crass statement in the 140-odd hours in which I have listened to the Minister during debates on this subject. It is like saying that we can discuss the Alton Bill without talking about the number of weeks. It is like saying that we can discuss the Licensing Bill without knowing when public houses are to open and close. We have been subjected to this kind of illogicality time and again when debating the Bill in the House and in Committee.

It would be useful to hear the answer to the question that was asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). I do not know whether it is charitable or uncharitable. My hon. Friend said that as the regulations seep out, poll tax will be deducted from people's benefits at source. That is what Opposition Members fear. It would be useful if the Minister, who is undecided about the question, could let us have an answer—yes or no, undecided, do not know—so that people who are surviving on family credit and income support may have some idea of what the future holds.

Amendment No. 137 refers to the attachment of benefits for the non-payment of poll tax. When he moved the amendment, the Minister for Local Government said that he supported equality of treatment. We all support equality of treatment. We would support equality of treatment so that all school children may have decent, hot meals. We want everybody to have decent housing and decent holidays, although the Minister for Health obviously does not believe that people on benefit should have holidays. How can the Minister talk of equality of treatment in relation to the poll tax when people on income support who do not have the financial wherewithal to pay the 20 per cent. will still be required to do so?

The Minister cannot ignore the other factors that affect payment of the 20 per cent. At present, somebody on

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income support faces a cut in benefit. If we are honest with each other, we will agree that, back in October 1977, benefit was actually cut. We are faced with single payments being abolished. Out of the £203 million that replaces single payments, only £60 million is in the form of grants, and the rest is in the form of loans. Already, someone on income support who has specific needs will have to pay back what he or she borrows. Water rates are included, without any clear element of income support to pay them. Electricity prices and television licence fees are going up. Many pensioners will face an increase in television licence fees.

Many people on benefit face such outgoings, and we are told that under the rebate system it will be possible for them to pay. The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) cannot ignore the fact that 20 per cent. is the national average. It is no good ignoring Opposition Members who say that people will be faced with more than the national average. Even by the Government's own standards, they will have less money to pay back.

Mr. Butterfill: Does the hon. Lady accept that the remedy is in people's own hands? If they were to elect a sensible council, such as mine in Bournemouth, the national average would more than cover the 20 per cent. If they choose to elect high-spending authorities, it will not. The remedy is in their hands.

Ms. Mowlam: The hon. Gentleman is ignoring two points. First, there are differences in needs. Many Labour local authorities face variations in needs, which is why the figure will be above the national average. Secondly, one lives in the real political world and knows that 25 per cent. of a local authority's budget will come from the business rate, 50 per cent. will be what the Government decide is needed, and the remainder will come from the poll tax. This means that there will be direct Government interference in the running of local authorities. This is not the democracy or the accountability about which we have heard in the arguments about the poll tax. Exactly the opposite will be at work. That is why the hon. Gentleman's point does not match reality. It is not local accountability; it is central Government control. That is the bottom line of what the poll tax is about.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Does the hon. Lady agree that, in the context of her point and the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), the proof of the pudding will come next week, when the Conservative party takes control of Langbaurgh council? Thereafter, there will be a direct comparison to enable all the people in that constituency to decide which way to vote in the future.

Ms. Mowlam: I do not know why I gave way to the hon. Gentleman on such a facile point. I hope that he will live in political reality and not in the political fantasy in which he seems to operate today. Langbaurgh council is a good example of a council in an area with a high level of needs, where the poll tax will not serve the needs of the people.

The hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) said that we must remember that fairness costs money. Many people will agree with that clear statement, and it must be remembered when debating the amendments. Opposition Members, along with some Conservative Members, have pushed hard for the rebate system and the amendments because it costs money to be fair. The prime aspect of the poll tax is that it is unfair and unequal.

Mr. Cormack: It is not good to send people to gaol for debt. The stories about debtors' prisons in the 19th century are hardly the most inspiring in our history. However, one must accept that there must be an ultimate sanction for those—that small group—who wilfully refuse to pay. I hope that there will be most strenuous efforts to ensure that nobody who cannot afford to pay finds himself or herself going to gaol. That would be quite unacceptable to people throughout the country.

Opposition Members know that their dislike of the measure cannot exceed mine. I have made that point plain on many occasions, both by what I have said and by my votes. At the same time, members of the Labour party who succour, support, encourage and incite those who are inclined to break the law do a grave disservice to parliamentary democracy and to their own position.

I know that there are strong feelings about this measure in Scotland and, no doubt, there will be in England and Wales. The way in which those strong feelings should be channelled and directed is the parliamentary, democratic way. Parliament is where the law is made and where it must be changed. If this measure is not amended significantly in future years, a Government will be elected, of whatever political complexion, who will change it. There will need to be much alteration and careful monitoring. I am unhappy that as yet no significant amendments have been made, but I hope that they will be made in the House of Lords. If they are, I hope that they will not be overturned here.

The law is the law. No legislator should ever encourage people to break the law that has been democratically passed by Parliament. Opposition Members share my dislike of the Bill and I hope that they will share that view. I hope that in a calmer atmosphere, in Scotland, England and Wales, there will be consistent democratic opposition while the measure is going through Parliament. By all means, let there be pledges to change, alter or repeal the Bill, but not incitement to break the law, because there lie anarchy and the destruction of the system that we are here to uphold.

6 pm

Mr. Barnes: I had hoped that the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) would be present when I made my speech because we had a dispute earlier about whether his role in these amendments and the provision for imprisonment had been that of a midwife. I refer hon. Members to the Standing Committee *Hansard* of 18 February 1988, columns 819-36, to check the role that he played. Had he been present, I would have gone into greater detail and he could have responded to my interpretation of what he said.

Just as many people have been unable to adjust to the cuts in social security and housing benefit—they are trying desperately to survive and are panicking about how they will manage—so masses of people will be unable to adjust to the imposition of the poll tax. Despite all that has been said about exemptions and rebates, that problem will become apparent, and it should be considered in the context of the speech of the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack).

If this measure is passed by Parliament, it will ride on people very strongly indeed. Parliament should give thought to what it is doing and should not impose on people burdens which lead to responses that cut over the division between law and order and potential lawlessness. There are bureaucratic pressures in this system and it makes attacks on privacy. There will be penalties for non-registration, and the penalties for non-payment will include the attachment of earnings, the sending in of bailiffs and distraint of goods and imprisonment.

With regard to poor people, the Minister says, strangely, that the ability to pay will be taken into account by the courts. If that is so, why cannot it be taken into account in the legislation? It is for us to introduce that principle into the measure.

The bureaucratic arrangements, invasions of privacy, penalties and, above all, the unjust payments that people will have to make will lead to many people disappearing from the poll tax register and the electoral roll. Many young, mobile people, and those who are encouraged by the Government to get on their bikes to look for work, will begin to disappear from the register. That is already happening in Scotland, and the surveys that have been carried out in this country show that that problem will extend here. At the election in June 1987, excluding Northern Ireland as this measure will not apply there, there was a 75 per cent. turnout. There were 42 million people on the electoral roll and just under 32 million people voted. If 10 per cent. of those people disappear from the electoral roll, 3·5 million people will lose their voting rights. That is a very serious problem.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Barnes: I shall not give way as the hon. Gentleman has not been present during the debate.

Young people and the lower socio-economic groups would be much more likely to vote for the Labour party, given the pressures that will be created by the poll tax, were it not for the fact that disproportionately large numbers of them will begin to disappear from the electoral roll. Conservative voters will certainly not be in that position. At the last general election, the Conservative party polled 13·7 million votes, the Labour party 10·1 million votes and there were 7·3 million votes for the then alliance party. The disappearance of 3·5 million people from those socio-economic groups is a very disturbing matter.

There have been many historic battles in the House about the extension of the franchise, and its development. We now have a universal franchise, but it is under attack. The poll tax seeks to perpetuate the Government's rule. It is not an open measure; it is not like the Parliament Act 1911 being used to extend Parliament because it is claimed that there is an emergency, such as during war time, nor is it a crude and hideous device such as that used in Nazi Germany when Hitler managed to pass an enabling Act to impose his diktat on society. Nevertheless, it is a fix, and we should be concerned about that. Parliament should be bothered about the manipulation that is taking place in this legislation.

Every hon. Member is a beneficiary of the extension of the franchise and should act to protect the franchise and ensure that a measure such as this is not passed.

The fate of those on the electoral roll who cannot pay or who feel justified in refusing to do so because of the injustice of this measure needs to be considered. Attachment of earnings will be used against them. It is a highly problematic measure, but when difficulties arise and when information is available to employers, will it finish up with the Economic League and will people end up on black lists and be unable to find employment? Will it be used politically against them?

Bailiffs present serious problems. Bailiffs may be directed against self-employed people and against many unemployed and partly employed people to get payments. I do not know whether many hon. Members have had a visit from the bailiffs, but I have been visited by the bailiffs because I objected to the operation of the Housing Finance Act 1972, not in any great illegal sense, but merely in a Gandhian sense of civil disobedience. I was willing to go before the court and face its decision and use that as pressure against that measure.

I was chairman of a ratepayers and rent payers association in the Dronfield area. For a fortnight we ran a rent and rates strike. I did not pay rent, only rates, and I withdrew the payment of the princely sum of £2·79. The bailiffs were sent in under the General Rate Act 1967. They took new furniture—a table, four chairs and a coffee table —and six LP records. If that system operates for many ordinary people for sums much greater than £2·79, it will be damaging. A table, four chairs and a coffee table might not matter much to some people, but at that time my home seemed to be denuded by the absence of those pieces of furniture. They were taken away because more money was needed than £2·79. Money was needed to cover the visit by the bailiffs and the retention and sale of the goods. I am not saying that four times as much money than is owed will have to be collected in regard to much larger sums owed for poll tax, but the secondhand value that could be obtained from the contents of many people's home will mean that their homes will be almost denuded.

That will not be the case when people have taken action to ensure that bailiffs cannot get hold of them, as was suggested by the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill). Ordinary, decent people who do not have the ability to pay will be visited by the bailiffs. The bailiffs' first visit will be to put the frighteners on people. They will put a marker on the furniture to be taken and give the people a time to pay. Later, they will come back and take away the furniture.

The final measure involves imprisonment. It is not unreasonable in certain contexts, but in the context of the poll tax it is an entirely unacceptable measure which exacerbates the evil of the Bill. We should be extremely careful about treating a whole section of society as criminals, as it is more likely that they will then start to behave in that way. Parliament will be responsible for creating such circumstances if we do not resist the poll tax legislation.

I am greatly concerned with the aspect of the measure involving democracy and civil liberties and rights. I mentioned it in the House when I pointed out that the Secretary of State for Scotland suggested that in Scotland petitions would be a legitimate means of finding out the names of people who should be on the poll tax register.

6.15 pm

Petitioning is an ancient right that goes back to Anglo Saxon times when people could petition the monarch.

[Mr. Barnes]

Later they could petition Parliament. In that regard, I wish to quote briefly from "Erskine May." On page 858 it states:

"The right of petitioning the Crown and Parliament for redress of grievances is acknowledged as a fundamental principle of the constitution. It has been uninterruptedly exercised from very early times, and has had a profound effect in determining the main forms of parliamentary procedure."

On page 147, it states:

"Any abuse of the right of petition will be treated by either House as a breach of privilege."

On page 869, it states that petitions themselves may be forwarded to Ministers—it does not say anything about the names—so that they can make use of and respond to them.

It is quite clear that public petitions—we are discussing public petitions in this case—are the property of the House and that people have a right to petition Parliament and to press their views without fearing that the information will be used against them, even at a future time when an illegal situation might then exist.

I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity that he did not take on Monday to disown that provision. If he does not, it may have to be raised as a matter of parliamentary privilege of interference with rights.

The House has to face a most serious situation concerning the defence of parliamentary democracy. Parliamentary democracy is under attack in this measure, which hits at civil liberties, petitioning rights and rights of franchise. Everything must be done to stop the measure being introduced, otherwise there will be problems about responding to the injustices that will occur.

Even the political philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who believed in sovereignty and in the right of the sovereign body to determine matters and considered that nobody should have the right to challenge it, asked that the sovereign authority should act in a wise fashion and not rile people or exploit them too strongly, because, whatever the circumstances, people could rebel. It is up to hon. Members not to pass legislation that puts people into a situation whereby the only way that they can justifiably defend their interests is to rebel against the provisions.

Mr. Boateng: There is something peculiarly unpleasant about the sight of Conservative Members in hot pursuit of those whom they would classify as the undeserving and intransigent poor. That is what the penal provisions of the Bill do. They establish as part of the monstrous machinery of enforcement envisaged in the Bill a means by which the poor will be persecuted, because under this Government, in particular, the rich get the pleasure and the poor get the pain. The Government's proposals are fundamentally unfair.

The Bill is monstrously divisive between north and south, between inner London and outer London, between London and the rest of the south-east and even between black people and white people because 67 per cent. of the black community in London will be net losers after the introduction of the tax compared with a far smaller proportion of the rest of society.

Still more, the Bill is divisive between those families who care for those who are least fortunate among them —an unemployed son or daughter or a distressed or disabled grandparent—and those who do not. It will be divisive among families and a threat to the cohesiveness of our community. Nowhere is that threat greater than in the monstrous administrative and enforcement machinery that the schedule envisages.

Mr. Butterfill: The hon. Gentleman suggests that those who care for elderly relatives will be disadvantaged by the Bill. That suggestion was made yesterday by a number of hon. Members, and I tried to intervene but was unable to do so. That is just not the case. If the hon. Gentleman thinks about it, he will realise that whether an elderly dependent relative living in a home is liable for the community charge will depend entirely on that person's income. If he or she is on a low income, or has no income, there will be an 80 per cent. rebate and they may also qualify for——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are straying from the amendment. We must return to the question of administration, enforcement and collection.

Mr. Boateng: We have drifted away from it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I have no intention of running away from it. If a family chooses to have the grandmother or the grandfather to live with them as opposed to putting that person in a home, as a larger family it will be penalised for making that choice. All the statistics bear that out. If the family income is limited, the position is even worse.

The provision is divisive both between groups of people and within the community. That division is made still worse by the provisions in the schedule that relate to administration and enforcement. A burden will be placed on councils. They will have to administer the community charge at great cost. It has been suggested in this debate that the cost will not be so great as we have suggested and that for political motives we have deliberately inflated the sums involved. Conservative Members would do well to consider the advice that this Government have received on that point.

One would hardly describe the Rating and Valuation Association as a politically motivated body, dominated by the extremists of the Left, whom Conservative Members have asked us to disavow. It is a responsible body that will be directly and professionally concerned with the procedure for the administration and enforcement of these provisions. The Rating and Valuation Association says that it is concerned because it believes that millions—that is the association's word—of people will attempt to evade the impact of this legislation. It says that an "expensive and intrusive inspectorate" will be needed to track down those whom it describes—they are the association's words, not mine—as the "missing millions."

We need to look at the impact of that expensive and intrusive inspectorate on civil liberties and on local authority and Exchequer expenditure. How will that inspectorate be received in the communities that it will be required to police? I mean quite literally police, because the idea that that inspectorate will be able to avoid a policing role and that it will not be required to poke and pry into people's lives is absolute nonsense. It will be responsible for compiling the register. Ordinary members of the public may have access to the register under the Data Protection Act 1984, but they will not have access to the minutiae, to the trivia, to the tittle-tattle, to the pieces of information to be found here, there and everywhere that the inspectorate will have to collect in order to compile the register. We have heard not a word from Conservative

Members about the access of the general public to that hidden register. We want to hear from them exactly how the privacy of the individual will be protected.

It goes even further than that. Local authorities will be required—they will have no choice in the matter—to act as the Government's snoops and agents. A fiscal gestapo will be established by the diktat of this Administration. It will be the job of men and women to gather information about who is or who is not trying to evade the impact of the tax. Conservative Members smile, some of them are indignant, but this intrusive inspectorate will be operating in their communities. They, too, will have to face that reality, just as ratepayers will have to face the reality of paying for it. Because of its impact on the ordinary people, that is entirely wrong and entirely unjustifiable.

In constituencies such as mine we are trying to create cohesive communities that stick together and can sustain growth and enterprise. How is the impact of such an inspectorate on those communities to be judged and evaluated? What will be the impact of the policing and the exercise of the bailiff's functions that will inevitably follow from these provisions? It will split those communities. It will set neighbour against neighbour. It will provide a fertile avenue for individuals to denounce people because they have a grievance against them.

We are told that the Government have received advice, not from a politically opinionated or motivated body but from a body that during the passage of previous legislation the Scottish Office felt it necessary to approach for advice, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. It appears that CIPFA has given advice to the Government on this issue and that local authorities have been told that it is important that they should be inventive in their approach to this task. Is it to be suggested that local authorities should set up sneak boxes, as was done during the French revolution, to get people to say whether a new person has moved into the neighbourhood or block, whether Mrs. X or Mr. Y has a new member of the household? Whether X is registered or not may determine whether X should be allowed to use certain civic amentities. Will local authorities be encouraged to produce a card to this end? It will be up to the local authorities; there is nothing in the legislation to preclude it.

Imagine in such places as the city of Westminster or the London borough of Wandsworth, where the writ of the Conservative party holds sway, people having to carry a card to show that they have paid their community charge before they are allowed to use the public swimming baths. Is that to be the nature of the enforcement procedure that Conservative Members propose? If it is, there is every reason to believe that we shall, indeed, have to put up with an expensive and intrusive inspectorate. If it is, this tax will be an incubus on the backs of our communities. It will sap and drain the civil liberties of individuals throughout the country.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): The hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) have made great play of civil liberties. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that it is a proper description of civil liberties to say that large numbers of people can seek to disappear—to use the description of the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East—and avoid making right and proper payments to the rest of the community while at the same time wanting all the benefits of belonging to the community? Is that his view of civil liberty?

Mr. Boateng: What is inconceivable and unacceptable, when introducing an inherently unfair tax, is the creation of machinery which will be intrusive, expensive, and all embracing and which will not provide adequate protection for the liberty of the individual in terms of his or her privacy. It is because it is unacceptable that we shall seek to divide the House tonight. There will be a price to be paid for this legislation. Initially, it will be paid by the whole community, but, ultimately, it will be paid by the Conservative Members responsible for introducing it.

6.30 pm

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, South): I make two preliminary remarks before I turn to the substance of my speech. First, as a solicitor, like my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham), I should declare an interest. I am pleased that the Government are making provision for my old age, with the amount of litigation that this legislation will create.

Secondly, I commend the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack). He showed by his statement and, of course, his vote the other night, along with his colleagues, an integrity which is sadly lacking on the Government Benches.

I came to this debate hoping to hear what the Government have learnt from the Scottish experience. In Scotland, we are conscious that the poll tax was floated there a year earlier than in England, as an experiment. I am sorry to say that the Government have learnt nothing from what is going on in Scotland and from the year's experience that they have had there. I listened, for instance, to the Minister talking about the low number of people whom he would expect to suffer imprisonment for debt. The Minister should look at and listen to what is happening in Scotland.

Let us look at some of the statistics that the Government have presented. They have produced estimated figures of the poll tax for every local authority area in the country. In Scotland, we have had the opportunity to look at those very carefully. In my own area of Aberdeen, the estimate was £200 per individual. From that estimate, we could see that the Government has not, for instance, taken any account of the cost of collecting the poll tax, of the shortfall in payment, and of those people who will not register and will simply hide from the register. Whether the Government like it or not, that will happen.

The figure that we in Scotland produced for each individual was nearer £260 or £270 a year for the current year. I am gratified that the director of finance for the Grampian region, which is the rating authority for my area, agrees with that figure. He assesses the figure for poll tax in my area as £261 on this year's figures. He has had to be realistic, as have all local government officers in Scotland. Unfortunately, the Government are not being realistic. The local authorities in Scotland are taking into account, for example, the fact that they anticipate a shortfall of some 10 per cent. in registration. I raised that point with the Minister at Question Time a couple of weeks ago.

We had about 63,000 electors at the June election in Aberdeen South, but by the time the draft register came

[Mr. Frank Doran]

out in December the total had reduced to 58,000. I do not pretend that the 5,000-odd voters whom we lost are all due to the poll tax, but a significant proportion of them are.

In addition, local authorities estimate that there will be about 10 per cent. of people with bad debt—people who will not or cannot pay. It is important to compare that with the present shortfall in rates payments. The Minister will be aware that the national figure is something less than 1 per cent. of arrears for bad debt on the rates. Local government officers in Scotland have to plan for about 10 per cent. of bad debt, because this tax will apply to far more people and will be far more difficult to collect.

The process of recovery which the Government have instituted in Scotland was recently analysed by a professor of Scots law at Edinburgh university, Professor Robert Black. He is one of our leading legal commentators. He commended the Government, not for the poll tax, because I think that he is an opponent of it, but for the way in which they had drafted the Scottish legislation. The professor said that it was drafted very tightly and that he had, in fact, never seen such watertight legislation. That legislation made it very difficult for people to evade their responsibility for payment of the poll tax. Those are not my thoughts, but the thoughts of Professor Black.

I compare that with what we have in England. As I understand the Minister's response to the various points that have been made by my hon. Friends, there are a number of difficulties which the Government are facing and which clearly have not been considered. I am not an expert on the English procedure. I know Scots law and, if I were to learn anything about English law, it would simply confuse me.

I read, for example, amendment No. 73 concerning the liability orders. In Scotland the procedure excludes the possibility of going to court. According to paragraph 3 of the schedule, the authority may apply to the magistrates court. Therefore, there will be an opportunity for hearings. What account has the Minister taken of the extra burden that that will place on the courts? If I am correct, and the local government officers in Scotland are correct, about the 10 per cent. bad debt, 37 million people in England and Wales may be liable to pay. That means between 3 million and 3·5 million new debtors. That is an assessment of the burden that this legislation will place on the courts, because of the fact that individuals will be entitled to defend themselves in court. What assessment has been made of the extra cost of, for example, legal aid? Have the Government done any research on that? As I say, in Scotland that opportunity is not available. I am not advocating the Scottish procedure as it is an outrage—it is almost an administrative procedure.

I wish to hear what the Government have to say about the extra costs that are involved. There are also the additional costs of imprisonment. Thankfully, in Scotland, when Parliament passed the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987, it did away with the idea of imprisonment for non-payment of debt. However, we see it being introduced here in England.

The Minister played down the anticipated number of people who will be imprisoned. If that provision existed in Scotland, people would be queuing up to go to prison. That is how strong the feeling is on the poll tax in Scotland. What consideration has been given to the burden that that will place on the prison service?

I have been travelling around London and the south-east of England, speaking to local groups about the poll tax, and I know that the feeling that we had in Scotland a year ago is here in England today, and is building up. In Scotland, there is a ferment about the poll tax. There is now as strong a feeling about this issue in England as there is in Scotland. There will be people who will take the opportunity to make a court appearance, because they will vocally refuse to pay the poll tax. What consideration has been given to such matters?

I conclude by saying that the Government have not learnt anything from the Scottish experience. That is typical of the arrogant and reckless way in which this Government carry out their business.

Mr. Pike: This afternoon we have been debating a group of amendments which address issues of considerable importance. They give us considerable fears as provided for in the Bill, and the amendments that the Government have tabled will further increase their power to enforce this legislation.

As I have cut my speech to the minimum, I shall not be able to refer to every speech that has been made in the debate. I have done so to allow as many hon. Members as possible—particularly my hon. Friends—to speak in the debate. It is significant that most of the contributions have been made by my hon. Friends. There have been few contributions from Conservative Members. That in itself shows our anxiety over these provisions in the Bill and in the Government amendments.

The hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) did something that is typical of the Government. Repeatedly throughout the passage of this legislation, when the Government have been in difficulty defending their legislation, they have tried to divert us from what the Bill is proposing and to focus attention on unimportant issues.

The hon. Gentleman said that two categories of people would be covered by the provisions in this part of the Bill —the "can't payers" and the "won't payers". It is significant that at least he accepted that there will be some people who cannot pay, because that is the issue that we have been arguing during our debates on this legislation. Because of the Bill's failure to take into account ability to pay, there will be people who cannot pay. That is the message that the hon. Gentleman should send to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and to his hon. and learned Friend the Minister who is to reply. The Government have not addressed themselves to the problem of dealing with those who are unable to pay.

Mr. Wilshire: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pike: No. I shall not give way now because I intended to give way only once as time is short and I want to say something else about the hon. Gentleman before I give way. I shall save him the need to intervene on a second occasion.

The hon. Gentleman then went on to attack my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) about the Labour party's position on the operation of the law. My hon. Friend made it clear where the Labour party stands on that issue. The Labour party is a democratic party and believes in exercising its power

through winning elections at local and national level through the ballot box. That is the way in which we believe in operating.

There is a difference between breaking the law, which we do not advocate, as we believe that laws must be made by Parliament or by local byelaws or decisions by democratically elected councils, and non-co-operation with the law. Conservative Members always seem to imply that breaking the law and non-co-operation with the law are unique to people on the Left of politics in this country. That is not true. One needs only to consider the legislation relating to comprehensive education. Many Conservative-controlled councils with responsibilities for education refused to co-operate with the legislation for many years and thereby hindered the education of our children.

Mr. Wilshire *rose*——

Mr. Pike: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman just once.

Mr. Wilshire: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Taking him back to my reference to "can't payers", I wish that he would remind the House that, as well as referring to such people, I explained the way in which we should handle that problem. No doubt the hon. Gentleman will conveniently have forgotten that I was explaining that the way to deal with "can't payers" was to do something about their income support.

With regard to my comments about the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), we still have not had an answer—can the hon. Gentleman give the House an answer—on whether he does or does not dissociate himself and his party from the comments of his hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) to the effect that he was in favour, and that Liverpool seemed to be in favour, of refusing to implement the legislation? That is incitement to break the law. It is criminal activity. Is that the policy of the Labour party?

Mr. Pike: My hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr was very clear on that. In fact, I have his statement on that, but because time is short I shall not repeat it. The hon. Member for Spelthorne and other hon. Members will be able to read my hon. Friend's comments in the *Official Report* tomorrow. The hon. Gentleman's attitude typifies the way in which the Government and the Conservative party work. They want to divert attention from the crucial issues of the legislation to issues which they feel are of more advantage to them and which, in many cases, are totally irrelevant to the real issues.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Does my hon. Friend not find it the height of hypocrisy that Conservative Members should mouth platitudes about staying within the law when on two occasions recently Ministers have come to the House with two sets of regulations which have been found to be unlawful by the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments but have insisted on railroading unlawful regulations through the House to impose the poll tax on Scotland?

Mr. Pike: My hon. Friend has made a valid point. Indeed, the Secretary of State who is responsible for this legislation probably has the record among Secretaries of State for breaking the law on the greatest number of occasions.

6.45 pm

I turn quickly to the amendments in the time that is now available. I must emphasise a point that has been made on several occasions this afternoon. The registration officer responsible for creating the register and for the collection of the poll tax is not responsible to the local authority, but is subject to the direction of the Government. The Bill clearly provides for that and the officers must carry out its provisions.

The Minister suggested that attachment of benefit was an issue that the Government intended to deal with by an amendment in the other place. We are rightly worried about the implications of that, because we will not be able to debate it at the length at which we would wish to do so. I hope the Minister will seek to ensure that when the Bill returns from the other place we shall have an opportunity to discuss that amendment. We in this House have the right to discuss Lords amendments, but because the Bill is guillotined here, it will be guillotined when it returns from the other House. Time may well be so tight that we shall be unable to debate these important issues at that stage. We are worried about that amendment and may well be utterly opposed to it and want to debate it at length.

Last night the Minister suggested that he would be conciliatory and that at a later stage he intended to introduce an amendment relating to prisoners on remand in custody. Having been given that undertaking, we want to see exactly what he proposes to do because we have fears about it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) made a valid point about enforcement and the role of the police. They will encounter difficulties and conflict because of certain duties that they will be asked to perform as a result of the Bill. They will come into conflict with the very people with whom they have problems in enforcing something that should not be within their responsibilities.

Unfortunately, because of the way in which the guillotine falls, we shall have to vote against the Government's first amendment in this group, No. 43, which is not the one that we consider the most important in the group. Because of the guillotine, we are precluded from voting on amendments that are perhaps even more important. However, by voting against that Government amendment we shall be showing our feelings on the subjects that we have been debating this afternoon.

Amendent No. 137 is a Labour amendment which would prevent the attachment of income support or social security entitlements to poll tax payments. I wish to make an important point, which has been made once or twice earlier. If there is an attachment for those who are entitled to the 80 per cent. rebate—against the other 20 per cent. which will be paid for from their benefit—and if that attachment to their benefit to meet that 20 per cent. is in an authority where the poll tax is above average, what will be the position if the attachment of benefit to pay the poll tax reduces that person's level of income, through benefit or income support, below what the statute decrees that person needs for his or her requirements? We would argue that such attachments of benefit to meet the 20 per cent. payment defeat the whole object of the accountability that the Government claim for the Bill. Such situations could arise where the poll tax is more than what the Government say it will be and where it is more than the average that will be paid in benefit to cover the 20 per cent. That is an important point.

[Mr. Pike]

As I have said repeatedly in our debates on the Bill, both in Committee and in the House, I want us to get out of the situation where we allow the Government to get away with talking about over-spending and high-spending authorities. The Government have failed to recognise that authorities have to meet the different needs and requirements within the communities that they represent. The Government are not prepared to accept that there are different needs and requirements throughout the country.

Government amendments Nos. 55 and 56 provide for imprisonment for the non-payment of residual rates and the national non-domestic rate. The Opposition believe that it is wrong to provide the power of imprisonment in such instances. Such powers are unnecessary and draconian. By placing these powers in the Bill the Government are showing once again that they recognise that the proposed tax is unpopular and that it will be difficult to collect. They understand that if they do not provide fall-back powers they will be unable to collect the tax and it will not work. They have failed to understand that they must deal with the crucial and fundamental problem of ability to pay.

Mr. Howard: First, I welcome the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) to the Opposition Front Bench. He and I have spent many hours discussing the community charge and many other issues in various Standing Committees. He made a substantial contribution to the deliberations that took place as we considered the Bill in Committee.

Unfortunately, in the devotion which he attributed to his party in its desire to abide by the law, the hon. Gentleman was guilty of a good deal of wishful thinking. We shall study with care the remarks of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). We shall also read and study with great care the remarks of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Field). We noted the embarrassment which was experienced by the hon. Members for Perry Barr and for Burnley when they listened to the incitement to law breaking from the hon. Member for Broadgreen. Their embarrassment was apparent to the entire House.

The contributions of Opposition Members have been characterised by what can be described only as hysterical hyperbole. Their technique is to describe legislation which is not yet before the House and which was not before the Standing Committee. The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) suggested that the proposed legislation will interfere with the right to petition Parliament. It will not. He asserted that it will interfere with the public's right to vote. It will not. The hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) said that it will be divisive for families. It will not. When we bring these facts to the attention of Labour Members, they say, as the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) said yesterday, "That is a matter of theory." We are not discussing theory. We are discussing the Bill as it stands and not as it is in the figments of the imagination of Labour Members. We are not discussing it in the form in which they would like it to be for the purpose of stirring up anxiety throughout the country. We are discussing the contents of the Bill.

Mr. Wilson: The difference between the subjective and the theoretical can be illustrated clearly by the Minister's response to the claim that we are discussing an anti-family tax. No one is claiming that there is a provision in the Bill that declares that it is an anti-family tax. Therefore, it becomes a matter of subjective judgment when determining whether it is or is not. My hon. Friends and I prefer to accept, for example, the unanimous view of the Scottish churches that it is a profoundly anti-family tax. We prefer to accept the view of organisations such as Age Concern that it is a profoundly anti-family tax. We are permitted to apply our subjective judgments and to conclude, whatever conscience-salving fig leaves the Minister chooses to wear, that the tax is all of the things that he has denied it is. That is why it is opposed by 80 per cent. of people in Scotland and why it will come to be opposed by 80 per cent. of those in England and Wales.

Mr. Howard: It is true that there are many individuals and, sadly, many organisations that have been misled by the propaganda of the Labour party. When my ministerial colleagues and my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Government Back Benches discuss these matters, we do not base our opinions on the opinions of others. We base our opinions on the contents of the Bill, and it is to its contents that I invite the attention of the House, not the second or third-hand opinions of others who themselves are likely to have been misled by damaging and hysterical propaganda.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Minister's argument would be rather more credible if on one of the substantive issues in this debate—the rules for dealing with those on income support—the relevant provisions were before the House. The reality is that they are not. We have only his information that an amendment will be introduced in another place. That is probably because he dare not introduce it in this place.

Mr. Howard: As I said earlier, all the arguments that we have heard on this important matter have been based on principle. Opposition Members have not said, "We might be in favour of imprisonment, depending on the terms of the regulations. We might be in favour of adopting the methods that you, the Government, have in mind for those on income support, depending upon the details." We have heard only arguments on principle from Opposition Members, and it is possible to discuss them in principle without having before us details of the legislation that will be introduced in another place.

I shall try to answer some of the questions that have been asked during the debate. I wish to put right some of the misleading assertions that have been made by Opposition Members. The hon. Member for Perry Barr spent a great deal of his speech—it was an extraordinary passage that bordered on hysteria—talking about the extent to which those who are to be responsible for enforcing the collection of the community charge will be employees of local authorities and responsible to them. He suggested that that would not be the position. The fact is —this is an excellent example of why it is important to read the provision in the Bill—that the Bill places all the powers and duties in respect of billing, collection and recovery of the community charge on the charging authority and not, as the hon. Gentleman suggested, on the treasurer. This is in contrast with the registration duties that are placed on a named officer, the community charge registration officer.

It was wrong for the hon. Gentleman to claim that the treasurer and not the charging authority will be responsible for collection and recovery.

The treasurer and his staff will carry out collection and recovery in practice but they will act under the direction of the authority. I do not know what caused the hon. Member for Perry Barr to make such an inaccurate assertion. I do not know whether he was confused by the provisions in part IX, which require each local authority to have a chief finance officer and set out the qualifications of that officer. That, of course, is an entirely different matter. Responsibility for all the duties that we have been discussing in this group of amendments will lie with the charging authority.

Nor is it the case, as was suggested by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe), that it was recently decided in the courts in Scotland that the registration officer for Strathclyde was an employee of the Scottish Office. The registration officer for Strathclyde is a local authority employee. He carries out the duties that have been placed upon him in both primary and secondary legislation. The recent court case in Scotland found that he was——

Mr. Rooker: Deal with the specific questions.

Mr. Howard: I am dealing with the issue raised by the hon. Member for Maryhill. The registration officer for Strathclyde was acting entirely in accordance with the law.

The hon. Member for Perry Barr talked about reasonableness and the information——

Mr. Rooker: Deal with the specific questions.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman asked a number of questions and I shall respond to them if he will give me the opportunity to do so.

The hon. Gentleman raised a question about reasonableness and whether registration officers should be confined to requesting information they reasonably require. That too was a matter that I dealt with yesterday in the course of the debate. I also said yesterday that there was nothing between us on that matter and I said I would see whether there was anything between the hon. Gentleman and the Government.

Mr. Wilson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Howard: The only tactic that the Opposition can adopt in relation to these provisions in the Bill is——

It being Seven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Orders [22 February and 13 April] and the Resolution of 18 April, to put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House proceeded to a Division—

Mr. Bermingham *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Does the hon. Gentleman's point of order relate to the conduct of the Division? If so, I shall take it now. If not, I shall take it afterwards.

Mr. Bermingham: Indeed it does. Is it not a fact that, when a point of order is raised before a Division is called, that point of order ought to be taken at that stage because it may materially affect the calling of the Division? My hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) attempted to raise a point of order a few moments ago and, although the point of order had been acknowledged by your good self, the Division continued to be called. Therefore, whatever point my hon. Friend wished to raise, which may have been germane to the legality or otherwise of the Division, was denied by the fact that the Division proceeded. Is it not stated in "Erskine May" that, once a point of order has been called, time and the House stand still until the point is cleared?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. The short answer is that I am bound by the timetable motion to put the Question at 7 o'clock. That is what I did.

Mr. Bermingham: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am not challenging your ruling, but merely seeking guidance. Is it the case, therefore, that once a timetable motion comes into existence, the rights of hon. Members to question the procedures of the House are put into abeyance?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that he must not drag me into arguments of that sort. I am bound by the timetable motions that are passed by the House.

The House having divided: Ayes 333, Noes 222.

Division No. 267] **[7 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael

Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.

Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mrs. Llin Golding.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions on amendments, moved by a member of the Government, of which notice had been given, up to the end of clause 22.*

Amendment made. No. 44, in page 13, line 33 at end insert—

'(3) Schedule (Community charges: enforcement) below (which contains provisions about the recovery of sums due, including sums due as penalties) shall have effect.'—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Schedule 2

COMMUNITY CHARGES: ADMINISTRATION

Amendments made: No. 47, in page 78, line 32, leave out 'and recovery'.

No 48, in page 78, line 34, leave out 'and recovery'.

No 49, in page 80, line 39, leave out from beginning to end of line 50.

No 50, in page 81, line 35, leave out 'as a simple contract debt'.

No. 59, in page 82, line 47, at end insert—

'11A.—(1) Regulations under this Schedule may include provision that a certification officer shall supply to a registration officer for a charging authority such information as is mentioned in sub-paragraph (2) below and fulfils the following conditions—

(a) it is in the possession or control of the certification officer,

(b) the registration officer requests the certification officer to supply it, and

(c) it is requested by the registration officer for the purpose of carrying out his functions under this Part.

(2) The information is—

(a) the name of each person who (on the day the request is made) is undertaking a full-time course of education at the educational establishment of the certification officer and has his sole or main residence in the area of the charging authority, and

(b) the address of the sole or main residence of each such person.

(3) The regulations may include provision that the information is to be supplied in a prescribed form and within a prescribed period of the request being made.

(4) A certification officer is an individual who is a certification officer by virtue of regulations under section *(Students)* above.

(5) The educational establishment of a certification officer is the educational establishment as regards which he is the certification officer.'.

No. 51, in page 85, line 5, leave out 'or 6'.—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Schedule 3

COMMUNITY CHARGES: PENALTIES

Amendments made: No. 60, in page 86, line 46, leave out 'or 11' and insert ', 11 or 11A'.

No. 52, in page 87, line 34, leave out 'and recovery'.

No. 53, in page 87, line 41, leave out sub-paragraph (3).

No. 54, in page 88, line 2, leave out sub-paragraph (2) or (3) above' and insert 'this paragraph'.—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Clause 22

APPEALS

Amendments made: No. 21, in page 14, line 1, leave out paragraph (c).

No. 57, in page 14, line 2, at end insert—

'(cc) any designation of an individual as a certification officer under regulations under section *(Students)* below,'.—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Clause 23

REBATES

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): I beg to move amendment No. 120, in page 14, line 24, leave out clause 23.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we shall take the following amendments: No. 4, in page 14, line 24, after '(1)' insert

'after consultation with local authority representatives, the Child Poverty Action Group and such organisations which appear to him to be concerned.'.

No. 229, in page 14, line 39, at end insert—

'( ) The amendments shall provide that rebates of 100 per cent. of the community charge shall be available to—

(a) people entitled to receive:

(i) income support with disablement premium;

(ii) income support with pensioners' premium;

(iii) attendance allowance;

(iv) mobility allowance; or

(v) severe disablement allowance;

(b) people who are registered blind or partially sighted'.

No. 230, in page 14, line 39, at end insert—

'No regulations shall be made under this section until the Secretary of State has presented to Parliament a report on the effects of the rebate scheme on elderly, disabled or handicapped people.'.

Government new clause 8—*Rebates: additional provisions.*

Government new clause 9—*Rebates: Extent of provision.*

Government new clause 16—*Social security*—

'Schedule *(Social security)* below (which amends the Social Security Act 1986 so as to make provision for benefits in respect of community charges in England and Wales and Scotland) shall have effect.'.

Amendment (a), in line 1, at beginning insert

'After making a report to Parliament on how community charge affects families and those on low incomes, the Secretary of State shall produce a scheme for rebates up to 100 per cent. and'.

Amendment (b), at end add

'providing rebates extending up to 100% of liability to an authority's community charge using an identical system of rebate entitlement assessment for all individuals over 18.'.

Government amendments Nos. 123, 233, 236, 234, 121, 122 and 124.

Amendment (a) to Government amendment No. 124, in paragraph 6, at end insert—

'31(H) A person who is

(a) entitled to receive:

(i) income support with disablement premium;

(ii) income support with pensioner premium;

(iii) attendance allowance;

(iv) mobility allowance; or

(v) severe disablement allowance; or

(b) registered blind or partially sighted,

shall be entitled to community charge benefit of 100 per cent. of their liability for community charge,'.

7.15 pm

Mr. Ridley: In Committee I said that we would replace with new provisions the provisions of the existing clause 23 which deals with rebates. Perhaps I may quickly explain the technicality of that.

Clause 23 provides for regulations amending the Social Security Act 1986 so that a rebate scheme can be made. That scheme will be made in further regulations. The clause 23 system, therefore, envisaged two sets of regulations, the one preparing the way for the other. The amendments which we are now discussing do away with the need for one of those sets of regulations by making on the face of this Bill amendments directly to the Social Security Act.

The details of the scheme will then be set out in regulations made under the amended Act and will be subject, of course, to full consultation with the local authority associations and other interested bodies. The House will also have an opportunity to debate the regulations in due course and to decide on an affirmative resolution.

Mr. Douglas: The Secretary of State will be aware that the amendments introduce legislation which will apply to Scotland. There is no Scottish Minister on the Front Bench to answer questions about that. In view of the urgency of finding out exactly what this flagship of Tory Government policy means before the local elections in Scotland, can the Secretary of State tell us when and how the consultations will take place in Scotland before 5 May?

Mr. Ridley: Of course, the amendments will apply to Scotland. Under the Social Security Act, when it is amended, regulations will be made affecting Scotland in advance of England, and also affecting England at a later stage when the community charge comes into force. We cannot make regulations in relation to the community charge until the Bill is enacted.

The central amendment is amendment No. 124 which sets out in a new schedule the detailed changes necessary to the Social Security Act to enable a system of community charge benefits to be established. The schedule adds community charge benefit to the other income-related benefits of the Act, and sets out the criteria for entitlement in general terms. These are similar to the entitlement criteria for the other income-related benefits. It sets out, again in general terms, the way in which the amount of benefit is to be calculated, and makes provisions for regulations to cover benefit for people who will be paying residual rates in the transitional period. Provision is made for regulations to set out the way in which couples are to be assessed for benefit.

The new schedule specifies that payment may be in the form either of a reduction in people's community charge bills or of a cash payment, if necessary. Benefit will be administered, as is housing benefit, by local authorities. The new schedule provides for this and for regulations setting out the administrative details. It provides also for a scheme of subsidies to be paid to local authorities in respect of community charge benefit.

Amendments Nos. 233, 236 and 234 are technical amendments designed to ensure that community charge benefit can operate in Scotland—I do not know whether the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) heard that—on the same basis as the rest of Great Britain when it is introduced.

In short, these amendments pave the way for a detailed scheme of benefits to be paid to people with low incomes. The amendments themselves are technical and do not

contain details of the scheme itself. As I have said, that will be for later regulations which will be the subject of full consultation, and debate and vote in the House.

Mr. Dalyell: I do not want to be difficult about this, but it is urgent because of what is happening in Scotland. Can the Secretary of State explain exactly what action will be taken by the Scottish Office or by his Department to clarify things north of the border?

Mr. Ridley: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I am coming to the details of the rebate scheme which will be put forward in due course by the Government. The regulations cannot be made until this Bill has become law because it amends the Social Security Act to enable the regulations to be made. Therefore, until this Bill becomes law, there is no possibility of making the regulations. I hope that the hon. Gentleman understands that.

I was going to explain exactly how the rebate system will work.

Mr. Douglas: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ridley: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman once more only.

Mr. Douglas: It is one thing for the right hon. Gentleman to plead in aid that he needs to get this Bill through both Houses, but we have a Scottish Act and we are up against a time scale. If the Secretary of State wants to plead that in aid in relation to England and Wales, I can understand that constitutionally, but the same argument cannot apply to Scotland, where we have an Act of Parliament on the statute book. Why have the Government been so niggardly and laggardly in explaining so that we can understand what the "great" benefits will be for the Scottish people from these measures?

Mr. Ridley: If the hon. Gentleman will let me tell him, I am coming to that. He has interrupted twice, asking me for what I have been trying to tell him. I do not know what more I can say than that.

My hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Local Government has sent a letter to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), giving the full effects of the new scheme. Of course, the scheme must take account of the changes in the Budget, which were proposed by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, and the improved rebate scheme, which I announced last week, and which greatly alters the benefits, the figuring and every detail of the rebate scheme. It is not proper, or possible, to give a full account of the true nature of the rebate scheme until those two aspects have been considered.

The Government's scheme, as improved last week, is extremely generous. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) tried to pretend otherwise in his winding-up speech on Monday night, but he grossly misled the House in his figures and missed the main point. The rebates are much more helpful than he alleged. I shall quote from his speech and then put the facts before the House, and the House may judge from what I say. He said:

"A couple with young children will receive no rebate if they earn over £130 a week".

In fact, a couple with net earnings of £130 a week will receive a rebate of 75p on the average community charge of £8·62 a week for two people.

Mr. Rooker: From what column is the right hon. Gentleman quoting?

Mr. Ridley: I do not have the precise column, but the hon. Gentleman will find it in his speech.

The rebate entitlement for that couple would run out not at £130 but at £131·77. The important point, however, is that the hon. Gentleman was quoting net incomes although he talked about earnings. A net income of £130 for that couple means a gross income of £170, or 81 per cent. of the national average wage. For a community charge of £300, that rebate would run out at £193 a week gross, or £10,036 a year.

Mr. Rooker: I have found the reference. The right hon. Gentleman is not very well briefed if he does not have the column numbers. I have found the comments in column 634. I went on to refer to a couple with a net income. Every reference was to net incomes. Why did not the right hon. Gentleman say the same thing in response to the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine)—it is column 619; I have column reference numbers—on the same point about a childless couple who will pay the full charge if their income is more than £100 a week? Why does not the right hon. Gentleman get his facts right?

Mr. Ridley: I did not intervene in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) or the speech of the hon. Member for Perry Barr because I wanted to check the facts first. The hon. Gentleman said:

"a couple with no children will receive no rebate if their earnings are over £100 a week."

That statement is not true. A childless couple on £100 a week would get a rebate of £1·11 towards the average charge for a couple, which is £8·62 a week.

Mr. Rooker: The Secretary of State is misleading the House. Why does he not read the next paragraph?

Mr. Ridley: Rebate entitlement would run out at £104·17. Again, the hon. Gentleman was quoting net incomes. A net income of £100 a week would gross up to £123 a week. The hon. Gentleman said:

"a couple with no children will receive no rebate if their earnings are over £100 a week."

The hon. Gentleman spoke not of their net earnings but of their earnings. He should have said net earnings. If the hon. Gentleman means earnings, it is not £100 a week but £123 a week. The hon. Gentleman went on to say:

"A couple with a net income of £100 per week will be expected to pay £10, that is, 10 per cent. of their net income, in local authority taxes."

The hon. Gentleman arrived at £10 by doubling the figure of £5, which he described as "near enough" the community charge per adult in the average area. In fact, the average charge per adult is £4·31, which doubles up to £8·62 for a couple. As explained, that couple would also receive a rebate of £1·11, which would bring their charge down to £7·51, which is 7·5 per cent. of their net income. The hon. Gentleman claimed that it would be 10 per cent. of their net income, which was totally wrong.

The hon. Member for Perry Barr said:

"the worker under 25 years of age . . . will receive no rebate once his earned net income goes above £50 a week."

The hon. Gentleman got it right that time.

Mr. Rooker: I did not. I was 75p out, and I am sorry.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman was 2·5 per cent. out. He said that that worker's

"poll tax will be £5, or 10 per cent. of his income."—[*Official Report*, 18 April 1988; Vol. 131, c. 634.]

[Mr. Ridley]

That was what the hon. Gentleman majored on. In that case, the rebate would be 61p on an average charge of £4.31, leaving a charge of £3.70, or less than 7·5 per cent. of net income. The hon. Gentleman was wrong in both forecasts of 10 per cent. of net income. The answer is 7·5 per cent. of net income and, of course, a very much smaller proportion of gross income. In fact, no one pays more than about 7·5 per cent. for the average community charge. I doubt whether the hon. Members who listened to the hon. Member for Perry Barr that night realised just how generous the Government scheme was and just how much the hon. Gentleman was misleading the House by quoting those statistics.

Mr. Rooker: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ridley: Only if the hon. Gentleman will apologise.

Mr. Rooker: Where I have rounded and used average figures—£5 a week when the amount is under £5—the comment is fair enough. I do not want to mislead anyone, but my point was that the scheme is not very generous. I used rounded figures and on one occasion neglected to use the word "net" in front of the income concerned, and I apologise. Will the right hon. Gentleman correct the figures in the next paragraph when I said that someone earning over £400 a week would pay only 1·6 per cent. of his net income in poll tax? Will the right hon. Gentleman correct me and say where I was wrong there?

Mr. Ridley: I never said that the hon. Gentleman was wrong on that point. I said—the hon. Gentleman has now admitted it—that, by shaving, rounding and making a few mistakes, the hon. Gentleman got the figures wrong. He majored on the point that there would be people who would pay 10 per cent. of their net incomes on the standard average community charge, whereas the figure is 7·5 per cent. If I had made such a mistake, the hon. Gentleman, rightly, would have taken me to the cleaners. I hope that he will acknowledge that he has been taken to the cleaners as a result.

I have now introduced the Government measures. I should like to hear what Opposition Members have to say on their measures and I shall reply later.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Mr. Matthew Taylor.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro) *rose—*

Dr. Cunningham *rose—*

Mr. Taylor: I am not sure whether this is an intervention. I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps I should make it clear to the House that, unless I had got it wrong, the Secretary of State had sat down. I proposed the Question and I paused for some moments before calling the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor). I see that the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) wishes to catch my eye and I shall bear that in mind.

7.30 pm

Mr. Taylor: The Labour Front Bench spokesmen made the specific point yesterday that they wanted a contribution from the official Opposition. I am sure that an official Opposition contribution will come in a few moments, but, for the moment, let us have a contribution from another party. I am sure that the Labour party will have its turn.

The rebate proposals were overshadowed at the start of the debate on the poll tax by the leaking of a Government document regarding rebates which exposed the Government's callous attitude towards the poor. We all know that the Budget, the social security changes and the poll tax will penalise the poor. That has been made clear time after time, not just by Opposition Members but by Conservative Members.

The leaked document put the situation in black and white and revealed that, while giving so generously with one hand, as the Government said they were, they had in fact considered ways of clawing back the money. That was indeed callous and calculating. The document stated:

"Careful attention should be given to the presentation of the terms of any change to rebates. This would need to be put in positive terms and in easily comprehensible layman's language".

The Prime Minister claims that the document has now been withdrawn, but the truth is that, in clear layman's language, the Government were trying to do a dirty behind the scenes. The Prime Minister and others may now state that there is no possibility of that being introduced; but we must now seriously consider whether there might be other schemes in the Cabinet, proposing other ways of taking back the money from the very people to whom the Government claim to be so generous.

If we consider the Government's supposed generosity in the new rebate scheme, there appears to be a significant failure there too. For 26 million people, the poll tax will still be a flat rate charge, under which a new teacher on a salary of £7,899 a year will pay precisely the same as a company director on £40,000 a year. That is fundamentally wrong and there is nothing in the rebate system that changes that fact.

Ministers may shake their heads vigorously and say, "No, no, no", but, at the same time, Conservative Back-Benchers say, "Yes, yes, yes. You're right. Something should be done about it."

Mr. Butterfill: I am a Conservative Back-Bencher and I do not agree with what the hon. Gentleman says. He is wrong to say that teachers will pay the same as a company director because the company director will be contributing far more through national taxation and thereby through the 50 per cent. than the Government subvention to the rate support grant.

Mr. Taylor: I have been hoping that somebody would make that point because the Conservative party is sending out a leaflet to constituencies. On one side of that leaflet, there is a standard text from Central Office. One section of that text points out how much more a company manager gives because of the VAT and income tax that he pays, but, in a different part of the page, it claims that poor people have never made any contribution to local government. Where do their VAT payments come in? The leaflet assumes that the poor do not pay VAT. If only the poor did not pay VAT. But they pay it and suffer far more as a consequence in terms of their ability to buy things.

Furthermore, the capital rule that has been introduced in respect of the Social Security Bill will apply to poll tax rebates through the housing benefit rules. People with capital of over £6,000 will receive no help from rebates. They are yet another section of society which is missing out

and desperately needs such help. How can one say to an old-age pensioner, "You should not be entitled to help because you have had the good sense and thrift to put aside £6,000 towards your old age"? Those people will get nothing from the rebate scheme, as it was originally proposed or as it is now put forward.

Many pensioners and others will look at the rebate scheme and think that the Government have offered some help to them. They may think that they cannot possibly be expected to pay the full charge, but, when the time comes in 1990 and they start to receive the bills, they will find that that is precisely what they are expected to do.

The change in the taper does not change the 80 per cent. ceiling imposed on rebates and, again, that will affect the poorest. Those who receive the full help of the benefit system will be precisely those to whom any changes in the rebate scheme introduced by the Secretary of State will make no difference. The artificial age barrier that has been written in stone in the Social Security Bill means that those under 25 years of age will not even receive the same help with their poll tax contributions as those over 25.

Those people earn the lowest wages and find it particularly difficult to obtain jobs, particularly if they have missed out after leaving school and have become part of the long-term jobless at an early age. Those people who find the lowest forms of paid employment—there are many of them in such parts of the country as my own, where wages are 20 per cent. below the national average—will be penalised still more strongly than their colleagues.

Mr. Leigh: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will comment on a remark made by my hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Local Government last night. He said:

"a newly qualified nurse would be likely to pay more local income tax than community charge in every local authority in England. In Camden her bill could be as high as £1,500, in Manchester £375, and in Durham £300."—[*Official Report*, 19 April 1988; Vol. 131, c. 751.]

Will that account for more than 10 per cent. of the nurse's income? What sort of rebate system does the Liberal party propose for a newly qualified nurse?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman does not listen to the debate at other times when he is in the Chamber. The figures quoted by the Government are based on their system of local income tax. Those figures are not based on our system. We gave those figures to the Minister yesterday and the figures that he quotes are quite simply wrong. Student nurses will do better under our local income tax system. We have given the figures to show that fact and, if the Minister cares to go through them, no doubt he will find this in them.

Mr. Simon Hughes: When my hon. Friend was making his point about the scheme that was leaked in the document in the last few days, the Secretary of State was nodding his head and saying, "Shame, shame." The Secretary of State can put the record straight in one of two ways. He can either release the whole of the correspondence, so that we know what was really devised, or he can give a guarantee to the House that, during the lifetime of this Parliament, the scheme will not be altered to anyone's detriment. Would my hon. Friend like to ask the Secretary of State if he is willing to give those assurances?

Mr. Taylor: I am sure that the Secretary of State heard my hon. Friend's point.

There is one other point worth making. In a proper system of democracy, where the only secrets are those that directly affect the national security interest and not just the interest of the Government, we would be able to look at those documents. We would be able to judge the Government, if not this week, then in the near future, after the immediate decisions have been taken. I hope that the Secretary of State will come forward with the appropriate measure, as he should.

The amendments are designed to meet many of the difficulties that I have mentioned. Above all, the amendments are about giving 100 per cent. rebates to those who need them. The Government have acknowledged the need for people on benefit to have such support. They have said that they will uprate benefits to cover people's 20 per cent. contributions to the poll tax. By making such a commitment, they cannot argue that those who currently do not contribute should contribute from the money that they now have. In one sense, they are accepting that those people should be fully compensated, but they have created the most appallingly complicated way of doing so, which hurts those people most in need of help and those who find it hardest to manage the money that they have and their day-to-day existence.

All hon. Members know through their experience in constituency surgeries and through correspondence that there are people who are simply not able to manage their affairs and who get into trouble. We are loading another difficulty on to them because they will receive a bill that they will not be able to meet. More than that, the rebate will go only to the more fortunate. Whole groups of people will not be fully compensated by an increase in their benefit to meet that 20 per cent. It will be done on an average basis and not on the money that they are asked to pay.

That may be done, as the Government say it is, to increase what they call accountability, but they mean to increase the tendency to vote Conservative because they believe that otherwise people will be penalised. Obviously, it will not work like that because this has a historic basis.

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Taylor: In a moment.

The basis of local authority spending has been built up over many years, as has the Government's assessment of what local government should be spending. It is subjective at that. The Government can manipulate the figures according to how they wish to work the grant system, and they do. On that basis people will be penalised, not through any fault of their own, but because of decisions which were taken quite possibly at a time when they were not voting in the local authority. It is inconceivable that Camden, Tower Hamlets or any other authority will suddenly be able to adjust its charges because of the poll tax and because these people will have to pay it. Even if the Government are right about accountability and the rest of it, it will take years to help those people, and that is not fair on them.

Mr. Butterfill *rose*——

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman is jumping up and down like a Jack-in-the-box, so I shall give way to him.

Mr. Butterfill: I wanted to intervene before the hon. Gentleman left that point. He suggested that we had the political motive that people would vote Conservative. Was he implying that only Conservative authorities were likely

[Mr. Butterfill]

to be prudent and have lower rates, and that authorities controlled by his party and other Opposition parties would always have high rates?

Mr. Taylor: Interestingly, in this year's round of rate increases, we managed to have the lowest average of all parties, so the hon. Gentleman does not make a good point. We have fundamental criticisms of the present grant system. I believe that a report today suggested that the gains would be almost exclusively in Tory constituencies, but that is not surprising when the grant system is biased in that way.

Tower Hamlets will be one of the hardest hit by these proposals. It has an acknowledged problem with supplying housing to an immigrant community. The need is not being met under Government financial aid. That is an exact example of the way people will be penalised for reasons that have nothing to do with them as individuals and, indeed, have little to do with any local party. A most draconian party could be determined to cut whatever it wanted, yet still have to spend substantial sums.

Do the Government intend to uprate the benefits as they claim they will, even in so far as this is written into the legislation? Ministers have steadfastly refused to assure us that the uprating of the 20 per cent. will be maintained. We accept that the Government will uprate benefits to meet the 20 per cent. contribution, albeit on national average figures. However, there have been reports that the Government intend to claw that back in coming years by failing to increase benefits as a whole in line with inflation. That appeared in *The Guardian* on 23 September 1987.

In Committee we asked on more than one occasion for a categorical assurance from the Minister that that would not be so, and we failed to get it. Will the Government give us that absolutely categorical assurance now because it is important that it should be given? In the light of the leaked Cabinet document, they must understand why we believe that it is so important that this assurance should be given.

The amendments relate to the treatment of those under 25. The age barrier written into the social security legislation will penalise the youngest in society—those on the lowest wages. Even with the new tapers, or an average community charge of £224 a year, it has been estimated that people over 25 will lose all help on income of about £58 a week. But for a person under 25 the comparable figure is about £50. I have not heard an explanation or justification for that and I hope that the Government will accept the need to amend that, so that at least these rebates are not based on something already iniquitous that becomes more iniquitous as a result of the introduction of the poll tax.

I hope that the Secretary of State can answer a specific point. Thank goodness, we have gained something from our debates. We appear to have had something of a minor victory on the collective community charge. It was repeatedly said, and the Minister assured us he would respond, that there were problems with the collective charge for people in hostels for the homeless, because they would have to pay the tax in full and then get a rebate, instead of paying only the 20 per cent. charge in the first place. The Minister said that he would look into the problem and, as I understand the regulations, I think that he has met that point. I hope that he can confirm that minor victory because the technicalities make it hard to be absolutely certain.

Those are the reasons why we are not at all happy about the rebate system. It is nothing like as generous as is claimed. These amendments do much to meet the specific problems that we raised.

Mr. Leigh: The rebates are too generous.

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman will not find that when his constituents spell out their financial difficulties. In three or four years' time he will be writing letters to Ministers and the Secretary of State, begging them to intervene to help constituents who have got into financial difficulties.

7.45 pm

Dr. Cunningham: These amendments are about rebates. Government amendment No. 120 rewrites the legal basis in the Bill under which rebate schemes will operate. In other words, the Government are not to rely on the social security legislation, as the Secretary of State said, but will include in the Bill a new schedule, Government amendment No. 124. The Government's need to write that into the Bill contrasts starkly with their refusal to include safeguards on civil liberties and privacy. The fact that they are making that change does nothing to improve the rebate schemes or to change advantageously the circumstances of millions of people who will be adversely affected by the poll tax.

We already know of the total inadequacy of these provisions because we have seen them in the recently implemented social security changes. Are the Government so proud of those new, mean, unfair and divisive social security provisions that they simply want to replicate them in the Bill? The answer is yes. Whatever word the Secretary of State might have used to describe the Government's proposals, he chose "generous" which was most inappropriate. He castigated my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) for misleading the House. No more misleading statement has been made this week in the discussion of these matters than that these proposals are generous.

The replication of the social security provisions means that pensioners with lifetime savings of as little as £6,000 in a bank or building society will receive no rebate of any kind. That cannot possibly be described as generous. Is it generous, for example, to implement proposals which mean that two pensioners living in their own home, whether a flat, bungalow, council flat, council bungalow or sheltered dwelling scheme in Dulwich, will pay more than a millionaire living in a mansion in Dulwich? Could that possibly be described by any reasonable person as generous? Of course not. It is grossly misleading to suggest that the scheme is in any way generous.

The scheme also means that an unemployed person, perhaps someone with a family who has lost his or her job in his or her forties or fifties and has redundancy payments of as little as £6,000, will not receive any rebate. In many cases, that will contrast sharply with the circumstances of the person who may have sacked him. In today's economic climate, a company director could easily be earning as much as £6,000 a week, yet will pay the same poll tax. Is

that generous? Would the Secretary of State like to comment and give his view as to whether he thinks that is generous?

Young people under 25 years of age also will be heavily discriminated against because there is no provision for a 100 per cent. rebate. The 3 million households that pay nothing now under the present rate rebate system—or did not do so until the beginning of this month—will now have to pay at least 20 per cent. of the charge. Is it generous to make 3 million households pay 20 per cent. when previously, under the much criticised rating system, they paid nothing? Of course that is not generous and the Secretary of State knows it.

I come to the Minister's much lauded—by him if by no one else—concession of last week. He appeared to be making a concession, but what will it mean in practice? The Secretary of State made great play about the figures. It has taken him and his hon. Friends until today to produce any figures. Those given by my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr were provided at a few hours' notice by the House of Commons Library. It has taken the right hon. Gentleman nearly a week to come up with the same figures.

I left the Chamber after Question Time today and received a telephone call from the BBC who said, "The Secretary of State has written you a letter about the rebate scheme." I said, "Oh no he hasn't." They replied, "Oh yes he has—we know all about it."

Mr. Ridley: Was it another leak?

Dr. Cunningham: No, it was not a leak. The letter was deliberately released by the right hon. Gentleman's office before it even arrived in my office. I had to phone the Secretary of State's office to obtain the letter that he was supposed to have sent to me. That is how proud he was of publicising his information about the rebates; he left it until the last possible moment. To cap it all—if that is an appropriate phrase—when the letter did arrive, it did not give the figures. I had to telephone the Secretary of State's office again and ask them to fax that information to me.

What do those figures mean? We know of the Government's intentions because of the leaked correspondence between the Secretary of State's office and the Prime Minister. In case Conservative Members have not yet had an opportunity to read that correspondence, I have brought along some copies, which I table for them to read. I hope that they will do so, because they are very important documents. Yesterday, the Prime Minister said to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition that he did not understand the full story because he had not seen all the letters.

Today, we asked the Secretary of State's office to give us copies of all the rest. If the Minister wants us to argue on all the facts, why does he not provide copies of the other letters? Not surprisingly, he refuses to do so, because he does not want the House to have all the facts. That is the reality of the situation. Why does he not put all the correspondence on the Table now so that his right hon. and hon. Friends and the Opposition can discuss the matter in the way that the Prime Minister apparently wants? Of course the Minister will not do so, because he wants to keep it all dark and because he knows how disgusting are all the manoeuvrings.

Mr. Ridley: I would not say that.

Dr. Cunningham: I say that it is disgusting for a Secretary of State in the British Government to make a public announcement that a concession is being made that will cost £130 million, if the House will forgive me for using round numbers, when at the same time the Government are planning to make others liable for the poll tax pay for that concession. The Government are even talking about changing the slope on the housing benefit scheme, to claw back more money from people even before the alleged concession can be implemented. If all that is not disgusting, I do not know what is.

Mr. Butterfill: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the Government should just print the money? Surely someone has to pay, and it must be either the general tax payer or the poll tax payer. The money cannot be manufactured out of thin air.

Dr. Cunningham: Of course not, but I contrast the hon. Gentleman's comments with the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget Statement. He did not seem to have any difficulty finding the money then. Money did not seem to be a very scarce commodity when the Chancellor stood at the Dispatch Box reducing taxes for the very well off in society. I do not recall the hon. Gentleman standing up then and asking his right hon. Friend where the money was to come from; he knew that it was coming from the poor and those on low incomes.

I say to the hon. Gentleman that his questions about where the money is to come from are just a little partial on this occasion. The Government were awash with money a few weeks ago when they wanted to help the very well off in society and reduce upper tax rates to 40 per cent. There was no concern then on the Government Benches about where the money was to come from; there was not a frisson, not a ripple. Conservative Members were waving their Order Papers in the air at the thought of all that lovely money showering down on those who were well off.

The hon. Gentleman is also fond of saying that problems cannot be solved by throwing money at them. The Government have certainly been throwing money at the well off as fast as they can. Money seems to solve their problems quite nicely, thank you very much. I say to the hon. Gentleman that his intervention was rather ill advised.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is it not interesting that, while Ministers were telling their Back Benchers facts that were far from the truth, by the end of the week No. 10 was very busy organising the Sunday newspapers, so that *The Observer*, *The Sunday Telegraph* and *The Sunday Times* all carried identical front page stories saying that the poll tax revolt among Conservative Members was all a plot by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) to get into No. 10? Mr. Ingham must have been working overtime.

Dr. Cunningham: Indeed, all sorts of stories were put about concerning the revolt by Government supporters over the iniquities of the proposals. It seems that anything was possible or usable in trying to discredit right hon. and hon. Members involved. When I reflect on some of the things said about them, they must flinch that, even now, Government Whips are again approaching them in the Lobbies, touching them on the elbow and saying, "Well, dear boy, you will be in the Division Lobby next Monday

[Dr. Cunningham]

night for the Third Reading, won't you?" I hope that they will think long and hard before joining their colleagues in the Lobbies and voting for this appalling legislation.

I return to the nitpicking of the Secretary of State over the rebate scheme. I shall give him some examples of his generosity. It is true that if one takes the average poll tax in England of £224, a single person aged under 25 with take-home pay of £50·75 per week—which is what he has to live on—will enjoy no rebate. To ensure that my figures were right, I asked one of my friends and advisers to make the calculation. It showed that such a person will have to pay a weekly poll tax of £4·30, which is 8·5 per cent. of his take-home pay. A pensioned couple in the same circumstances with a net income of £110·40 will have a weekly poll tax bill of £8·60, or 7·8 per cent. of their income. They also will receive no rebate. In inner London, where the poll tax will be higher, the figures will of course be worse.

8 pm

The Secretary of State need not try to—I hesitate to use the word—mislead the House about the generosity of the measure. He knows very well what is happening to these people. The now famous exchange of correspondence includes a letter from his private office from one of the civil servants who are of the highest integrity, in this instance Deborah Lamb. The letter points out that the Secretary of State himself expressed concern because

"in his view, the marginal tax rate illustrated in that minute of 90·1 per cent: for low earners is already excessive, particularly after the income tax reductions in the Budget".

I hope that the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) listened to that. Even the Secretary of State recognises, at least in private, the unfairness of the Government's approach following the Budget. That is what the right hon. Gentleman's correspondence says. But then he comes to the House and tries to convince us and the country that he is being generous. Of course he is not.

By definition, because of the averaging on uprating of social benefits, people in areas where 20 per cent. exceeds the national average will be additionally out of pocket. In some cases, especially in inner London, they will be substantially out of pocket. In other areas, without reason, they will be gainers. I do not agree with the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) who said, "We accept it." My hon. Friends and I certainly do not accept it, because it does not properly recompense even those people who have to pay 20 per cent. of this appalling tax.

During Question Time today, I asked the Secretary of State what he had to say about his right hon. Friends in the Cabinet at the commemorative service at Westminster abbey this morning. He did not reply. I shall give him a second opportunity. In the responses in the service to launch the Church urban fund the Archbishop of Canterbury asked:

"What is he sending us to do?"

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—and, for all I know, other Ministers who were there—responded with gusto and alacrity:

"To share our wealth with those in our cities who are poor, powerless or disadvantaged, and to help them to build a new future for themselves and for us all."

Does the Secretary of State really believe that the poll tax will contribute to that aim? Does he agree with that? Of course, we know that the right hon. Gentleman does not agree with it from the many quotations on the record which were referred to in Monday's debate.

Our amendment (a) to new clause 16 introduces the principle of 100 per cent. rebates. It is possible, because of the guillotine, that we will not be able to express our support for the amendment, although I hope that arrangements can be agreed that will enable us to do so. Let me say, however, that we strongly support the principle of 100 per cent. rebates, and I urge all hon. Members to vote for the amendment. If it is not possible for us to record a positive vote, we shall express our disgust at the meanness of the proposals by voting against the Government's amendments.

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): It is a pleasure to follow the speech of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) on this issue. We are much closer to agreement on it than on most other issues, as I have made clear in my votes—and non-votes—on this measure.

Although I intend to address my remarks to rebates, it is a pleasure at last to rise to speak on the Bill. I tried gallantly to do so on Second Reading and again in Monday's debate on new clause 1. Let me now briefly say that, while I am very grateful for any concessions that help poorer people, the rebates as offered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State are insufficient to change my mind on the Bill.

I do not wish to appear ungrateful. My right hon. Friend knows that I am a nice sort of person. If he were to make a concession that in any way altered the principle of the Bill—as was so ably set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) and those who voted with him—rather than a belated concession that helps the poor but is essentially financial, we might reconsider our position.

My interest in the subject is fairly long-standing. I do not expect hon. Members to remember it, as it may not have been particularly remarkable, but I made my maiden speech on the subject back in March 1974. Then, and in subsequent speeches over the years—for instance, on ten-minute Bills—I have urged the abolition of the rating system. What I have never urged or believed in, rebates or no rebates, is a community charge, let alone a uniform business rate.

Let me explain briefly why the rebates have not changed my mind, in spite of my gratitude to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Essentially, the principle remains as unfair now as it did before the concessions. The ability to pay is crucial. The hon. Member for Copeland has done my job for me with the facts and figures, but I have a list that has been cribbed from hon. Members on both sides of the House—£1 here, £5 there and £10 there. The fact remains that we are dealing with the principle of a poll tax that is fundamentally wrong. As the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) said, 26 million people will pay the standard rate of poll tax. It has also been confirmed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—in response to a very able intervention on Monday by my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison)—that the £6,000 capital limit applies in this instance.

Another principle that is unaltered by the rebates is that of the nature of the poll tax, which is undisturbed by the fact that it represents only 25 per cent. of overall local government revenue. I hope that I was not alone in being slightly amused yesterday morning when, lo and behold,

my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made one of his earlier broadcasts—after the 7 o'clock news—following the result of the vote on new clause 1. I waited for him to say, with all the eloquence that he has displayed over the past year, that this was not a tax but merely a charge on 25 per cent. and that the remaining 75 per cent. would arrive one way or another through taxation. But, in an able and dazzling interview lasting some four minutes, he referred to the charge as a tax no fewer than eight times —I counted them. I wonder whether that has anything to do with a change of mind on his part, or with the other place, which no doubt will be considering his earlier utterances.

Another fundamental point is that the 25 per cent. leaves 75 per cent. That is another reason why the rebates are insufficient for me: the 75 per cent. will become a matter of Government control, either through grant or through the uniform business rate. The House would be foolish if it consented to such a degree of Government control.

My third reason—rebates or no rebates—is that we cannot govern this country as if it were entirely ruled by extreme Left-wing socialist authorities—it is not. This measure is not the best way to deal with those parts of the country that are so ruled.

Finally, although I am not ungrateful for the concessions—I welcome the rebates—and shall not be voting against the Government on this, I slightly resent aspersions cast against us at the weekend that we are trying to embarrass the Government. I thought that my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East was terribly kind about last weekend. It is perhaps easier for me than for him to say that it was not one of the most angelic political weekends that I can recollect. I say, as one Back-Bench rebel on this matter, that I am not out to embarrass the Government. I am not nature's greatest rebel, but when something is as fundamentally wrong as this, and the decisions on it have been taken in the sequence that they have been, it is the duty of at least some of us to stand up and be counted. The late concession of these rebates serves only to add to the strength of our argument. The necessity for them shows the fundamental weakness of the measure.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): My high regard for the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) was justified the other evening when he voted against the Government, and when, the following day, *The Guardian* awarded him a knighthood. That was evidence that virtue is its own reward. I agree with many of the things that he said this evening, and he will forgive me if I concentrate on amendment (a) to new clause 16, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) referred.

I want to talk about the problems of the disabled, the frail and the elderly, whom the amendments could help. Even if there were a distant prospect of the amendments being carried, the measure that the Government support and the legislation for Scotland that is already on the statute book will do untold damage to the most vulnerable people in society, and their very existence invites urgent repeal.

The Secretary of State said—and my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland was right to mention this—that this was a generous measure. His capacity to use the English language in that inspiring way is not shared by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, by Mencap, by RADAR, by the Royal National Institute for the Blind, the Royal National Institute for the Deaf, the Spastics Society or any such organisation that I know of, nationally or in my constituency, which has considered the poll tax.

A few weeks ago, during the Easter recess, I visited the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling), where I saw the excellent Edinvar community care project. Because of the interest of the community, of Edinburgh district council, Edinburgh university and the people of Edinburgh, that housing project provides a place to live for six people who have mental handicaps. They live in the community and are helped by others there—people who signed a housing missive knowing that help would be expected from them. I was there because of the consequences of the Government's social security provisions. Because of the reductions in housing benefit, there was a disgraceful question mark over whether the project could continue. Happily, mainly due to the help of Edinburgh district council and the flexibility of civil servants in the DHSS, that problem has been resolved since.

8.15 pm

The Secretary of State speaks of generosity, but when those six people come to pay the poll tax the question will arise again. Such payment cannot be a viable proposition. I hope that the project can be saved, but I know that community care in many parts of the country will be challenged openly by this provision, and it is disgraceful that Ministers should utter platitudes and give us statistics when they must know of the damage that their poll tax will do to people who are disabled, mentally handicapped, the elderly and others. Bearing in mind the exemption that the Government deliberately introduced in residential establishments, we shall find that people living in them, whatever their wealth—and many of them are there because of the help that the Government are determined to give to private owners through the DHSS—will benefit from the exemption and so triumph over those still living in the community.

So, despite the fact that the number of places in no way meets the demand, if people in community care do not have the sorts of rebates to which my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland referred, they will naturally look for places in residential establishments. Because of the difficulties of access, many people in residential establishments who might be able to live in the community and would often be encouraged to do so will refuse to do so. This measure, therefore, offers no help to those in residential care or those in the community and is a further sign that the Government have no strategy to deal with community care for the most vulnerable people in society.

I want to refer briefly to two important reports. I do not know whether the Secretary of State has read them, but he and the rest of the Cabinet are obliged to assure the House that there is some co-ordination of policy objectives. That hardly seems to be the case now. The Griffiths report on community care does not coincide with what the Government are proposing. The Government have not sought to publicise the report, so I remind the right hon. Gentleman of what Sir Roy said:

> "If community care means anything, it is that responsibility is placed as near to the individual and his carers as possible."

He also said:

> "It cannot be managed in detail from Whitehall".

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

What is the poll tax if not an attempt by Whitehall to manage in detail?

Lady Wagner said:

"Every adult person entering a residential establishment with a view to an extended stay should be entitled to a trial period during which nothing would be done to dispossess them of their previous accommodation."

Does anybody really think that the system of elderly people going into care and having that trial period, during which they will be expected to pay the poll tax, will work? The truth is that the Government are introducing chaos instead of community care.

There are many defects in the so-called community charge. That view is shared by the overwhelming majority of British people. When the time comes to repeal the legislation the people of Great Britain will accept that, at long last, the House will have accepted its responsibilities to the most vulnerable people within our society. Clearly, this measure is a long way from achieving that.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) is absolutely right. There appears to be a total lack of co-ordination in the Government's policy on disabled people. The amendments in my name and those of my hon. Friends—Nos. 229 and 230—which are combined with this bank of amendments, try to ensure that a rebate of up to 100 per cent. of community charge is available to certain specifically defined groups of disabled people.

The Bill will make disabled people suffer. It takes no account of ability to pay. The organisations to which the hon. Member for Monklands, West referred would have preferred some form of banded system or progressive system of taxation that would take into account the needs of disabled people and their resources. Allowance could also have been made for their additional needs. In the absence of any such progressive system, there needs to be a better provision for rebates.

The advantages of our amendments are, first, that they offer a means of defining disability that is as automatic and unobtrusive as possible. Secondly, the amendments are compatible with the principles of good community care, in that they seek to ensure that there are no financial penalties for people seeking to move into the community or financial disincentives to stay in the community. The hon. Member for Monklands, West made that point. In other contexts, he and I have argued about the need to ensure that policies of other Departments supplement and co-ordinate the community care policies that the Department of Health and Social Security is advocating.

The hon. Gentleman referred to two recent reports. There is also the Audit Commission report. A series of reports go down the same road. We should certainly look for greater recognition of disabled people within major legislation, such as the Bill.

As the Bill stands, disabled people will lose disproportionately. While, to some extent, the present rating system is progressive, the poll tax will be regessive, falling hardest on those who are least able to pay. Disabled people are disproportionately represented among low income groups and will therefore be hit harder by the poll tax. As many as 40 per cent. of long-term sick and disabled people have low incomes, compared with 23·3 per cent. of the non-disabled population, according to the DHSS low income families review.

In considering ability to pay, it is important also to bear in mind that an Office of Population Censuses and Surveys showed that half of all employees with disabilities had incomes below 42 per cent. of average earnings, while one quarter had earnings below 32 per cent. of the average. The rebates in the Bill do not provide disabled people with appropriate protection from the consequences of paying the personal community charge.

The compensation for the 20 per cent. contribution, which apparently is built into income support for those who depend on income support, can be argued to be far from adequate for disabled people. It does not take into account the additional costs of living that disabled people have to face. They will undoubtedly suffer as a result, even at the 20 per cent. level, particularly in areas in which the poll tax will be at higher levels. Many inner city areas, with which I am not so conversant from a personal or a constituency point of view, that provide most services for disabled people—some of the boroughs that do most for disabled people—happen also to have a high level of rates and may have a high poll tax. There are instances of disabled people who have moved into such areas because they know that services are available there that are not available in areas which are not willing to raise money to provide services.

The poll tax will also have damaging consequences for the benefits that some disabled people are getting from the present domestic rate concessions. Under the Rating (Disabled Persons) Act 1968, disabled people can receive rebates on housing that has been adapted to their needs. During the passage of the Scottish legislation in another place, Lord Glenarthur for the Government recognised that fact, when he stated:

"We therefore propose that additional help which could extend up to 100 per cent. of the community charge should be available for a clearly defined group of severely disabled people.—*[Official Report, House of Lords*, 30 April 1987; Vol. 486, c.1665.]

Up to 100 per cent., he said. That commitment appears to have been ignored in the way in which rebates are being calculated.

Under the Rating (Disabled Persons) Act, the cost of rebates was £61 million, benefiting 102,000 disabled people in 1985. Many of them were on low incomes, but not necessarily on income support. As we know, many disabled people want to be in jobs, but they are in jobs that, necessarily, are low paid.

Another unacceptable part of the Bill is the way in which mentally handicapped people are being stigmatised and defined. By inserting our amendments, there would be a way around that, because the same benefits could be defined without categorising mentally disabled people as a group on their own who need to be certified. Despite the changes that have been discussed, the process of exemption remains certification by another name. There is certainly a dilemma facing the parents of mentally handicapped people who are considering applying for exemption. They risk further labelling of their severely mentally handicapped son or daughter or paying tax themselves out of what are often scarce resources. To that extent, the measure is offensive to people with a mental handicap and to their parents who deal with them.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West referred to the effect on community care. There is a real danger that the pressure of the system will be towards keeping people in

institutional care. The Government's own social security advisory committee noted that if claimants are expected to pay 20 per cent. of their rates, the result would be

"increased hardship, increased debt or both."

The poor levels of rebate under the present proposals will ensure precisely that for disabled people. The prospects for community care will look bleak as disabled people are presented with yet another financial hurdle to overcome if they are to live in the community. Disabled people do not seek or want special treatment under the poll tax legislation because of their disability. What they do need is a system that takes account of their ability to pay and the problems that they face. That is the intention of the amendment. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations has applied itself to that matter. In the context of the amendments, it states:

"We envisage that disabled people will face major problems should the Government's proposals pass through Parliament unamended. First of all, the proposals for the operation of the community charge will act as a direct disincentive to the community care policies we are all so keen to see extended. With exemption from the community charge for residents of residential care homes, and the failure to compensate adequately disabled people living at home, there will in the first instance be a simple financial disincentive for disabled and elderly people to continue to live in or move back into the community."

That is the background of my amendment. I realise that, if the Government's amendment is passed and clause 23 is deleted, it may not be possible for me to press the House to a Division on amendment No. 229 as I would otherwise wish to do. Although amendment No. 230 brings in a general point, it is still geared to clause 23. Therefore, it may be in the interests of the House to look for an amendment—possibly Labour's amendment (a)—that broadens the argument which applies to other groups but which could be applicable to the disabled people to whom I have referred. Whichever way, the Government are duty bound to say how they will give disabled people a better deal.

8.30 pm

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) rightly said that the thrust of Government policy for care in the community is not assisted by the introduction of the community charge, which penalises members of families who are removed from hospitals or nursing homes and taken home.

Our deliberations in Committee were greatly assisted by my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Sir B. Rhys Williams). Tonight's debate is the poorer for his absence, and I suspect that the Government's majority will be one greater because he is not here. However, he has left us with new clause 8.

It is generally accepted that it is a bad idea to tax the poor. We are now agreed that we are talking about a tax, and I was slightly surprised by the Government's initial proposals, whereby those on benefit would have to pay 20 per cent. of the community charge, but made no provision for increasing their benefit to enable them to pay that amount. However, that matter was put right about a year ago.

It is further agreed that the system of obliging the poor to pay makes no contribution to the funding of local government. Those who are on benefit can get 80 per cent. rebated at source and 20 per cent. back through their supplementary benefit. At the end of the day, a vast sum of money will have changed hands with no net contribution to the funding of local government.

The poll tax is being introduced for one reason only —accountability. It is important to discover whether accountability is achieved by rebates. We have a foretaste of what is likely to happen because this year, for the first time, those who receive benefit have had to pay 20 per cent. of their rates. I shall give an example from my constituency of a man and wife who receive benefit and are out of work. This year, for the first time, they must pay 20 per cent. of their rates and their benefit has been uprated by 20 per cent. of the average poll tax.

However, other things have happened at the same time. Rents in the London borough of Ealing have increased and service charges and underlying rates of benefit have changed. At the end of the day, that man and wife may be £1 or £2 better off, but there is no way in which they discover whether they are in or out of pocket because rates in Ealing are at a specific level. The sums are not disaggregated, so if they are out of pocket they do not know whether to blame the Government or their rent and rates. Already, one is seeing people at one's advice bureau who, as a result of the social security changes, are somewhat perplexed. They are unable to decide whether the London borough of Ealing or anyone else is responsible for what has happened.

At present, that man's wife receives no rate demand. To that extent, she is left out of the equation. He applies for a rebate and pays 20 per cent. of his rates. The purpose of the poll tax is to include his wife. What will happen when the poll tax comes into force? The wife will have to register and will receive a bill. As she will have no income, she will apply for an 80 per cent. rebate, which will be rebated at source. What about the remaining 20 per cent.? She will not receive that sum because it will be added to her husband's benefit. Thus, she is brought into the equation and becomes accountable, but will not have a penny to pay.

The Government say that the husband will go to the post office, draw benefit, find the 20 per cent. of the national average poll tax—which is not his, but his wife's —and give it to his wife, who will then see whether the national average is more or less in the London borough of Ealing. If it is more, she will be out of pocket, and I do not know how she will pay rates. If it is less, she will pocket 4p or 5p a week. She will then go to the post office and pay her bill.

We all know that that scenario is absurd. The husband will pay the bill for both of them out of the joint benefit that he will have received. The notion that his wife will be made more accountable and that the new system will rekindle a long-lost interest in municipal affairs is rubbish. Much bureaucracy will be involved, and those two people will say, "Who on earth invented this new system?". The idea that they may take their anger out on the London borough of Ealing, if they work out that their rates are above average, is misguided. I think that their attention will focus on whoever devised the new scheme.

We have gone beyond the stage at which it would be possible to exempt them from the charade of being marched into the system, being given money, and marched out again. However, we can insulate against any financial loss, which is why, if there is to be a Division, I am minded to vote for amendment (a). Although it would not offer total protection, which would be logical, it would insulate

[Sir George Young]

them from the financial consequences of this measure. We are talking about people on low incomes, and I see no reason why we should make their incomes any lower.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): I agree entirely with the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) that people tend rightly to focus their discontent on the Government.

The two terms that will live and be repeated whenever people discuss the poll tax are, first, that used by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), who described the poll tax as the "Tory tax", and, secondly, the adjective used by the Secretary of State, who described the rebate scheme as "generous". Those terms will be repeated constantly by Opposition Members and their supporters.

My hon. Friends have already drawn attention to the problems of disabled people. I shall not say anything further about those problems other than to say that I agree entirely with my hon. Friends. My hon. Friends will recognise that many less well-off people deserve to be considered for more generous rebates. I use the phrase "less well-off" because it was used in the famous correspondence that was leaked this week.

The Government tend to assume that people who are less well-off, whether they be disabled or not, have been adequately helped by the improvement in income support of 20 per cent. of the average poll tax rate. The Government forget that many less well-off people do not receive income support from other sources—whether it be as a result of their thrift from wages or private pensions; the pension is deferred remuneration and deferred wages —and because their income is pence above the threshold at which one stops receiving income support, they have not had an increase of 20 per cent. of the average poll tax rate. Those people will particularly suffer, and in the past many of them have voted for the Conservative party. They will describe the Secretary of State's proposals as the Tory tax and will express through the ballot box their resentment of his description of the rebate scheme as generous.

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful for the opportunity to make one or two remarks. I was prompted to comment during the speech of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). His speech was economically illiterate and politically disingenuous. He is an intelligent man, and I think that he was doing that deliberately. His speech was a pot pourri of traditional Labour party taxonomics—tax the rich, soak the rich and away with enterprise and wealth creation. What he said was quite irrelevant to the debate and wasted our time.

The hon. Member for Copeland repeatedly drew examples out of the air. It is easy to make comparisons between the chairman of a company earning a large salary and somebody who is just above the rebate line and say, "They are paying the same poll tax." The hon. Gentleman gave example after example, ignoring the fact that the top 10 per cent. of income tax payers will be paying 10 times more than the bottom 10 per cent. The hon. Gentleman ignored the fact that when this reform is passed three quarters of the cost of local government will be accounted for by the business rate and the general taxpayer, which is based on ability to pay.

The Labour party continually tries to divert the debate along the line that we shall all be paying the same for local services. By so doing, it is deluding the electorate. The hon. Gentleman did not apologise on behalf of his hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), who tried to convince the House that some people on low incomes, even after rebates, will be paying 10 per cent. or more of their income. My right hon. Friend said that they could be paying as little as 7·5 per cent.

Whatever system of local taxation we have, whether it is the local income tax favoured by the Liberal party or the system favoured by the Labour party—a local income tax coupled with a property tax—there is bound to be a high marginal rate of income tax at the bottom and it is bound to create some poverty or earnings trap. They know that there is no way out of that.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Will the hon. Member give way?

Mr. Leigh: No. I have very little time as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wishes to reply to the debate at 8.40 pm.

All systems suffer from that. The hon. Member for Copeland failed to present any system of his own to the House. He knows that any system would result in a relatively high level of taxation on the lower paid. I want my right hon. Friend to know that we on this side of the House think that the rebates that he has brought forward are quite generous enough. We do not feel that he needs to go any further. He has got the equation about right.

Mr. Ridley: It is not surprising that Monday's debate spilled over into rebates and that the debate tonight on rebates has spilled back into the principle. That is what my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) was saying, as many other speakers have tried to get back to the principle that was established in the vote on Monday night. I have every sympathy with my hon. Friend's inability to be called on that occasion, and I am delighted that he was called today, but I do not think that he will expect me to repeat the arguments of Monday.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) was also speaking on the wrong day, because the incentive to go into residential care or stay at home was debated yesterday and my hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Local Government gave a convincing and comprehensive answer, which the hon. Friend clearly did not hear. I recommend him to read *Hansard*, and I shall not bore the House by repeating those arguments this evening.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ridley: No. I have very little time as I have cut my time short so that every hon. Member could get in.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) repeated the arguments that were made in Committee about rating relief for the disabled. He knows perfectly well that under the present rating system disabled people who had to have extensions to their houses which could have led to a higher rates bill were excused that increase. Of course that will not arise. Whatever the facilities in someone's house, he has to pay the community charge, not on the basis of his housing, but on the basis of his status as an individual. Therefore, it is inappropriate to reintroduce that relief, as the hon. Gentleman knows full well.

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) kept asking for categorical assurances and guarantees, as if the world would never change and no contingencies would be applied. I can tell him, particularly in relation to the

maintenance of benefits in real terms, that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services has a statutory obligation to review benefits each year. Decisions are made taking account of all the circumstances at the time. The hon. Gentleman will find that each year the House has the opportunity to debate the uprating of social security benefits. In the same way, community charge rebates will become a benefit and will be within the purview of those arrangements and will be assessed, put to the House, debated and voted upon every year.

The hon. Member for Truro, supported by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), returned to the question of a 100 per cent. benefit, as indeed did my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young). He argued again, as those three hon. Members did in Committee, to substitute for the 20 per cent. uprating plus the 80 per cent. rebate arrangements a 100 per cent. rebate. However, as has been pointed out, a 100 per cent. rebate would be nonsense. It would be a pointless process to make someone liable and then give him a 100 per cent. rebate. Therefore, that in itself cannot be the answer.

As has rightly been pointed out, the reason why it is better that everyone should contribute at least 20 per cent. is that everybody would have an interest in the conduct of their local authority and would be able to play a part in forming the decisions of that local authority through their votes. That is the basis of the whole scheme. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Acton does not like it, but it would be absurd at this stage to return to the point of principle that has been established that everybody will play a part. Therefore, I cannot recommend the House to accept amendment (a).

8.45 pm

The hon. Member for Truro also spoke to amendment (b) and referred to the different treatment between single people under 25 and those over 25. The hon. Gentleman will have heard the debate in Committee, when the point was firmly made that this is a part of the social security reforms to which the House assented in what is now the Social Security Act.

The main reason why there is a distinction between the under-25s and the over-25s is that most of those under 25 live at home and do not have household expenses, while the majority of those over 25 are householders and therefore have household expenses. That is not an entirely watertight distinction, but it recognises the special expenses that older single people have when they become householders.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ridley: I shall not give way, as I have little time and many points to answer.

That means that the structure of the community charge benefit is the same for individuals under and over 25. For net income up to income support level they will receive the 80 per cent. reduction. As income rises above that level, benefit tapers off by 15p for each extra £1 of income. The only difference is that the income support levels themselves are different for individuals above and below 25. As I have already explained, that merely reflects the fact that 80 per cent. of those under 25 are not householders and therefore face lower household expenses than do the majority of those over 25. That view commended itself to the House when it approved the income support level regulations.

The hon. Member for Copeland did not receive the letter that I placed on the board at 3 pm, and I apologise to him if the communications between us did not work with their usual immaculate regularity, but I gave him the details of the rebate. I maintain my view that it is a generous rebate.

The hon. Gentleman can attack the rebate only by returning to the argument about ability to pay and by comparing the rebated contributions of various groups with the contributions of people who are very much better off. Of course, by such comparisons the differences will be very marked as they are on gross income and net income and any other way in which we compare the fortunes of the rich and the poor. There will be large differences, but that is not the point. The point of my assertion that the rebate is generous is that the points at which people start to get on to the rebate taper, and that points where they lose rebate altogether are fairly high figures of net income, and even higher figures of gross income, which compare very favourably with anything that has gone before, and certainly anything that the Labour party ever achieved when it was arranging such matters.

Mrs. Fyfe *rose*——

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ridley: No.

Finally, I want to deal with the question of the leaked letter, which was referred to by two hon. Members. The word "disgusting" was used in that context. I must confess that I think it is disgusting to pick up stolen goods and then to shred the evidence. It will give great aid and comfort to criminals to know that the Opposition are prepared to dispose of the evidence.

Mr. Simon Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Member for Copeland does not seem to understand how the system works. The rebates are paid for by the community charge payers, he said, but that cannot be true, because the rebates before I improved them, and the rebates as we now have them, are all part of one thing. The Government's contribution to local authorities covers both the grant to local authorities and the cost of the rebates. If a higher rebate cost is fixed, it will automatically result in higher community charges for a given, limited, fixed grant.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had to tell the House, because the point was not apparently taken, that that flows through into the level of benefits, but that it is corrected, if it is wished to correct it, at the time that the level of grant is fixed. If the total level of grant is increased, there will be no impact on the community charge, but if it is increased it will have an impact on the community charge.

The correspondence made it clear that I believed, long before my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) put down his amendment, and long before Monday's debate, that the taper was a little harsh and not as generous as I should have liked it to be. It is now clear that I thought that a long time ago. If my colleagues had agreed that we should slacken the taper on the community charge rebate, it would have made no sense whatsoever to increase the housing benefit taper in the same year. Naturally, we decided not to do so. It is all very simple, if only the Opposition would listen to what I am saying.

Dr. Cunningham: The Secretary of State's return to the Dispatch Box was a bit like the return of Crazy Horse. His speech made a bad situation even worse. He described undiscovered and unnamed civil servants as criminals. That can hardly improve his relationship with them.

I accept the Secretary of State's apology about the delay in receipt of his letter, but it is a little disconcerting to receive letters that we are not supposed to have more quickly than the ones that we are supposed to have.

As for the bucolic and intemperate intervention of the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), if anyone was here on the wrong day it was he, because he did not deal with rebates. Apart from being here on the wrong day, he also appears not to be on the same wavelength as the Secretary of State. I remind him of what the Secretary of State said about the matter in Committee on 23 February. As the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle was an assiduous attender in Committee, I am sure that he heard what the Secretary of State said, which was:

"With a flat rate charge it must be true that the burden will fall more heavily on those with low incomes than on those with high incomes."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 23 February 1988; c. 936.]

That is what I said, too. That is why we are opposed to the principle of a flat rate community charge. We believe that the rebates are inadequate. That is why we have tabled amendment (a).

It is Orwellian that something that in Committee was called a rebate has suddenly and miraculously been renamed a benefit. The Secretary of State referred to benefits as though people were being given something. What they are being given, in his terms, is a slightly less onerous Bill. They are not being given anything. To describe it as a benefit is almost as bad as the Secretary of State's use of the word "generous" in this context, a word which will return to haunt the Secretary of State and his right hon. and hon. Friends again and again.

I hope that it can be agreed that Government amendment No. 120 should be taken on the nod and that the amendments from then onwards to new clause 5 should not be moved. We agree that the Government's new clause 16 should be taken on the nod. Amendment (a) should be written into the Bill, because it would provide for the paying of rebates of up to 100 per cent. of the poll tax.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 25

DEFAULT POWERS AS TO REGISTERS

Amendment made: No. 193, in page 15, line 18, leave out 'expires' and insert 'ends'.—*[Mr. Ridley.]*

Clause 26

DEFAULT POWERS AS TO RESOURCES

Amendment made: No. 194, in page 16, line 2, leave out 'expires' and insert 'ends'.—*[Mr. Ridley.]*

Clause 28

INTERPRETATION

Amendment made: No. 58, in page 16, line 34, leave out subsection (5).—*[Mr. Ridley.]*

New clause 16

SOCIAL SECURITY

'Schedule *(Social security)* below (which amends the Social Security Act 1986 so as to make provision for benefits in respect of community charges in England and Wales and Scotland) shall have effect.'.—*[Mr. Ridley.]*

Brought up, and read the First and Second time.

Amendment (a) *proposed as an amendment to the proposed clause*, at beginning insert—

'After making a report to Parliament on how community charge affects families and those on low incomes, the Secretary of State shall produce a scheme for rebates up to 100 per cent. and'.—*[Dr. Cunningham.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 225, Noes 330.

Division No. 268] **[8.57 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*

Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Killedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David

Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones and
Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Nine o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Orders [22 February and 13 April] and the Resolution [18 April], to put forthwith the Question necessary to bring to a decision the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Clause added to the Bill.

Clause 32

DUTY TO SET SUBSTITUTED AMOUNTS

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): I beg to move amendment No. 22, in page 19, line 12, at end insert 'and'.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this it will be convenient to take the following Government amendments: Nos. 23, 33, 34, 24 to 32, 61, 63 to 65 and 62.

Mr. Mitchell: The purpose of this group of amendments is to change the financing of passenger transport authority expenditure from precepting on the collection fund to billing the metropolitan districts. The change is designed to increase accountability. I am sure that hon. Members will have issues to raise and questions to ask to which they would like to have replies on the record. As there is only a short time available for debate, it may be for the convenience of the House that I hear the points that hon. Members want to make and reply fully to them.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): It is deplorable that this group of amendments should suddenly appear on the Notice Paper as part of this appalling Bill. The Minister's speech was entirely in keeping with the Government's view of local democracy and the view of the Department of Transport towards national transport policy matters. When I saw that the Minister was to move the amendment, I thought that we would get the usual carton of powdered valium sprinkled over us. That is something for which the hon. Gentleman is fairly well known. It seems that even the valium is in short supply when he treats the House with such contempt.

There is no excuse for these amendments appearing during our debates on Report. If any function and service has been overly messed about—I put it at its kindest—since the Government were first elected, it is public transport. As recently as March 1986, as a consequence of the Transport Act 1985, metropolitan county councils were abolished. The deregulation of bus passenger transport in all areas, with the exception of London, consequently took place. New passenger transport authorities were formed from within the metropolitan districts and the passenger transport executives were obliged to part company with their bus undertakings. Moreover, since 1986 the passenger transport authority has become a precepting authority on the districts. Until the Bill is enacted, it will have a separate needs assessment for grant purposes.

This massive reorganisation of public transport was in part justified by the Government by removing public transport from what they considered to be remote and out-of-control metropolitan counties and giving it to locally elected districts. My hon. Friends who have sat through our consideration of the Bill will be aware of the quality and calibre of the Secretary of State for the Environment. There is an old political saying about the Peter principle and rising to the level of one's incompetence. The Nicholas principle takes people far beyond that level until members of their own party actually notice.

In 1984 the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), the then Secretary of State for Transport, spoke about the precepting of new passenger transport authorities. He said:

"In the metropolitan counties we accept the need to provide a continuing mechanism for decisions on a countywide basis—for instance, on the provision of subsidy for socially necessary but unprofitable services. That is why we shall provide for joint passenger authorities with members appointed by the constituent districts. That reverts to the previous arrangements which worked perfectly satisfactorily."—[*Official Report*, 7 November 1984; Vol. 67, c. 202.]

He was referring to the Local Government Act 1972, which was another attempt at legalised ballot-rigging by the Conservative party. The passenger transport authorities created under that Act were regarded as being eminently satisfactory in 1984, yet we are told that for reasons of accountability they are unsatisfactory in 1988.

9.15 pm

The consultative paper that accompanies this shabby piece of legislation states:

"The principal objective of the new finance regime is to promote accountability to the electorate."

The new Conservative doctrine on accountability is to stop locally elected councillors from taking decisions. If anything illustrates the lack of confidence, despite the public relations puffs, emanating from Conservative Central Office about the result of the local elections on 5 May, it is a piece of legislation such as this. Far from being confident of taking control of many of the constituent bodies that make up passenger transport authorities, the Government, through this piece of legislation, are reduced, as usual, to removing accountability from locally elected councillors and taking it upon themselves.

How is this shabby piece of legislation to work? We all know the philosophy behind it. Because nobody took advantage of the Transport Act 1985 as it related to passenger transport authorities, they are being encouraged to do so under this piece of legislation.

When one looks at bus services across the former metropolitan county areas, one is struck by the number of cross-district boundaries through which those services pass. For example, in Greater Manchester no less than 65 per cent. of bus services cross a district boundary. In the Conservative party's attempt to justify this piece of legislation, it is a pity that passenger journeys do not match the dreams—if that is the right term—of civil servants who thought up the boundaries in the first place. As I have said, in Manchester 65 per cent. of journeys do not match up to that dream. In Merseyside, south Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear and the west midlands about 40 per cent. do not match up and in west Yorkshire 30 per cent. do not match that view.

When local authorities are being encouraged to secede, as they are, do they secede completely or can they do so partly? For example, can they opt out of the concessionary fare scheme that covered the former county council areas while remaining in the scheme for socially necessary bus services? Instead of listening to the Whip who is telling him how long he has to speak, will the Minister write these questions down? If we do not have any other opportunity to hear the reply, we shall see that the same questions are asked in another place where we hope a bit more time will be allowed. Will part secession be allowed under the proposals?

I know that the consultative document talked about the need for economic efficiency. I believe that that was the phrase used. If we are to remain with that phrase, how is economic efficiency to be promoted if all the different aspects of administration at passenger transport authority level are to be spread throughout the districts and if those districts that secede are to be responsible for such things as socially necessary bus services? On a matter of concessionary fares, will part opting-out be allowed?

From the consultative document one would have thought that only railway services were involved. Obviously they are important. We must ask what will happen in the future to such splendid passenger transport initiatives as the Tyne and Wear Metro, Merseyrail on Merseyside and the light rail transit proposals for the Greater Manchester area and the west midlands. Will authorities like Solihull be encouraged to reduce the amount payable to the former precepting authority because the initial proposal for the metro system in the west midlands does not include Solihull? Is not that likely to be the outcome of the encouragement which is being given to metropolitan districts on secession?

If a new scheme does not pass through a local authority area, that authority will be encouraged to ask why its ratepayers should be responsible for part of the scheme. That doctrine does not appeal in London where authorities south of the river are still expected to pay towards London Underground, most of which is north of the river. That doctrine does not apply in the last bastion of rural Toryism, the shire counties, where the niggardly amounts of support given to public transport are paid on a shire county rather than on a district council basis. Why do the Government single out these authorities? The explanation is simple. All of them are guilty in the eyes of the Government of being controlled by members of the Labour party. That is what the legislation is about and that is why this tacky amendment has been moved.

The Minister, in his second major contribution to the debate, shakes his head. He talked about accountability. If we are to be held accountable for public transport, why do the Government not make the same proposals for the police and the fire service? They do not because such a proposition would be laughed out of court. Even some of the tame and neutered tabby cats who sit behind the Minister, hoping for office, would be likely to object. I had better be careful because the Secretary of State for Transport is sitting beside the Minister. However, even some Tory Back Benchers would think that it was going too far to vote for so-called accountability for the police and the fire service.

Because of the deplorably short time which has been allowed for this debate, I shall have to conclude by putting some questions to the Minister. How will the proposal improve the accountability of passenger transport authorities to the local electorate? We would appreciate a deep insight into Government thinking on that philosophy. How will the billing of district councils improve their accountability to the local electorate? What is the difference between billing and precepting? Perhaps most important, what financial resources will district councils have to pay the passenger transport authorities' bill? Will the Minister, if he ever manages to clamber to his feet again, give an assurance that the resources available to district councils will amount to as much as is given to passenger transport authorities currently?

Why do the Government claim that fears that district councils will secede are exaggerated when, in the consultative document, they encouraged district councils

[Mr. Peter Snape]

to do so? What effect do the Government expect secession to have on value for money in support for public transport, given the likely duplication of resources to which I have already referred? Do the Government understand what the effects will be on passengers, operators and the quality of service in metropolitan areas if they alone are no longer able to support public transport on a county basis?

The proposed legislation is deplorable. We shall encourage as much disruption as possible in another place. I say that conscious of the fact that those other tame tabbies who are dining at the moment but who normally sit in the Press Gallery will once again accuse the Labour party of fomenting discontent nationwide. The Government detest public transport. They detest local accountability even more. For those two valid reasons my right hon. and hon. Friends should vote against the amendment.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I want to put to my hon. Friend the Minister some questions that are perhaps more serious than those raised by the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape). The Government's objective, which is to bring about greater accountability in passenger transport provision, as in numerous other local government services, is admirable. The question is solely whether the new financial regime for the passenger transport authorities will bring about greater accountability. The theory is that, because members of the PTAs are appointed by the districts and are not directly elected, they are not accountable directly to the electorate. I accept that the existing system lacks that element of full accountability.

There is quite a strong argument in favour of direct election of the members of PTAs. The question is whether a financial regime incorporating levies instead of precepts would provide greater accountability. There is possibly a question mark hanging over the matter. It seems to be a fairly finely balanced judgment. The trouble is that even if districts believe that they are paying too much they have no sanction available, other than the threat of secession from the PTA if the Secretary of State agrees. It is either one thing or the other. There is no half measure. Secession from the PTAs should be contemplated with the greatest caution. I do not know of any metropolitan district that has considered having recourse to section 42 of the Local Government Act 1985 in respect of any service administered by a joint board.

Short of seeking to secede, the district representatives, it may be claimed, will apply greater pressure if the districts are billed. I believe that in reality they would want to apply exactly the same pressure if they favoured better value for money, even if the community charge payers were precepted. To put it another way, would a Conservative council put across a muted message because the ratepayers or community charge payers were precepted?

Dispensing with precepts has certain accountability disadvantages. A major point in favour of the community charge is that it enables the individual responsible for paying it to judge the performance of his or her local authority, with no ifs or buts. The fact that, following the enactment of this legislation, the charge will incorporate an element covering the PTA levy will blur the edges of accountability. It could enable high-spending authorities to claim that the responsibility for increases is not theirs but someone else's. This would confuse the elector and perhaps damage the pure accountability of the community charge system.

The elector will not see on his or her community charge demand a separately itemised figure for local transport services. Even now, I believe that many ratepayers welcome the fact that since the creation of the joint boards they have been able to assess the amount that they are paying for these jointly funded services. This measure of accountability, which was so recently granted for transport, is apparently now being snatched away again.

I should like to ask my hon. Friend the Minister some questions about secession and to ask for some reassurances for those who live in the metropolitan districts. A large number of passenger journeys cross district boundaries, and commuting journeys in particular fall into that category. Districts do not necessarily coincide with commuting patterns. To give an example from my constituency, the town of Ilkley is in the Leeds travel-to-work area, even though it is in the Bradford metropolitan district. Many people travel each day from Keighley in the Bradford district to work in Leeds.

The problem arises mainly with train services, which generally cross district boundaries, but also with bus routes to a considerable extent. If a district such as Bradford or Leeds decided that secession was in the interests of its residents, what reassurance can my hon. Friend provide that the district would not be able to secede without proper provision being made for those who do not pay a community charge in the district, but nevertheless depend on transport routes which extend into that district?

In summary, I wish to ask my hon. Friend two questions. First, cannot the possibility of secession, which is meant to encourage passenger transport authorities to provide better value for money—that is a worthy objective—be allowed for with fewer disadvantages under a precept regime than under a levy system? Secondly, what reassurance can he give my constituents who fear that the proposals might be a threat to the cross-boundary services on which they depend?

9.30 pm

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): I shall be brief, in my view far too brief for the needs of the subject. The fact that it is being dealt with in 45 minutes is not just a result of the guillotine motion. The matter came on the scene far too recently for proper discussion. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) said, whatever else happens tonight, the matter will have to be opened up in another place. The classic reason for the existence of another place is to give a chance for a reappraisal, in this case the first real appraisal of a problem that affects the areas of the disbanded metropolitan counties.

A piece of correspondence was given to me and to other hon. Members when a deputation from the West Yorkshire PTA came to see us. I noticed then that the first letter from the Department of Transport was dated 22 January and that comments had to be received by 15 February. Three weeks is not a sufficiently long period for proper consideration.

The first point that I want to make is perhaps not too important to those of us who represent the city of Leeds,

which is probably the most powerful and richest part of West Yorkshire. The cost of the PTA will now be based on the size of the adult population. That may be fine for Leeds, but it may not be excellent for Calderdale and those areas on the sides of the Pennines.

I noticed, incidentally, that the note that came to the PTAs from the Department of Transport—I read it as a justification—stated:

"It is proposed to abolish the power of the PTAs to set a local tax rate—a community charge".

The Department of Transport appears to be against a community charge.

I promised to be brief so that my hon. Friends could also contribute to the debate, but I wish to raise two points in respect of the same piece of paper mentioned by the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller). We all asked for that to be made available to us. We asked that it should be made available to the Minister for Public Transport. I telephoned and asked that that should be done and, therefore, we were working under the assumption that the questions would be dealt with by the Minister when he opened the debate so that, when we contributed, we could take the matter a step further. Apparently, that will have to be done in the other place.

I wish to put in practical terms question No. 6 asked by my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East in respect of West Yorkshire. We were told that the services in West Yorkshire that would suffer, if they did not disappear altogether, would be countywide tickets, such as metrocards and saver strips, which are valid with all bus operators and on rail services. What about the uniform concessionary fares scheme? Will we have a separate concessionary fares scheme in all five districts? The public information services cover the whole of West Yorkshire. The timetable changes still occur every two or three days. They have to be published quickly or in advance to cover all operators under the new legislation.

What about support for the local rail network, the patronage of which has increased by 50 per cent. in the past four years? The cross-boundary services in West Yorkshire account for 80 per cent. of the services. If West Yorkshire is to be split up, if there is to be secession or if the scheme will not work as well as previously, 80 per cent. of West Yorkshire's bus services will require some public financial support. One third cross one district boundary or more.

What about the management of the infrastructure—bus stations, shelters and stops—and support for innovation? In Leeds we are talking about trolley bus services and light railways, and that would be paid for by the people of Calderdale. I first went to Leeds 25 years ago when it was an old county borough and we are proud of having our bus services and so on. But we are not going back to that; we are going forward to a disjointed service between the five parts of the county.

In the past week I have listened carefully to all the talk about the community charge. The possibility of community charge capping was put to us. I do not want to take up time and go into that question, but the West Yorkshire PTA is greatly worried that there would be community rate capping there. If we in Leeds implemented a light rail scheme which had to be paid for on the other side of what used to be the county, Calderdale could find itself community charge capped, despite a perfectly proper decision by the PTA to undertake major expenditure elsewhere. I shall not develop the point because I imagine that the Minister is well aware of it.

Those two points out of the six put by my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East worry us in West Yorkshire. I do not believe that here in London where people are used to the bigger area of the old London county council and the Greater London council the Government appreciate the position in the disbanded metropolitan counties. We require answers to those questions tonight. We shall lose the vote. This is not the exciting stuff of two days ago, but the matter will be raised again in another place. There is great anxiety in West Yorkshire and it has been my aim to bring that again to the Minister's notice.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): I, too, shall be brief because of the disgraceful shortage of time to discuss this important issue.

The Government's case appears to be based on the argument that PTAs are not accountable. Yet only a couple of years ago the Government abolished democratically elected councils which were directly accountable to the people who elected them and were responsible for running transport. We know that the police, fire and civil defence authorities will retain precepting powers although they are in exactly the same position as PTAs.

The argument is not only grossly hypocritical, but is incorrect, because PTAs are accountable. Indeed, they have a statutory duty under the Transport Act 1985 to consult local councils, local operators and other interests and individuals when formulating policies for public transport systems. They have a statutory duty to consult the business community, and during such consultations Tyne and Wear chamber of commerce and major privately owned bus companies have shown that they share the PTA's concern and have offered their support and efforts to change the Government's attitude. The authority must also work in close co-operation with local councils, which provide PTA members. Clearly, Tyne and Wear PTA lives up to the spirit as well as the letter of the law and has welcomed consultation and discussion.

It is equally clear that if the Government are promoting the disintegration of countywide integrated transport, the Department of Transport is openly canvassing secession and the countywide provision of transport is again under threat. We know that if canvassing does not work, pressure will be applied to the district councils to secede.

Tyne and Wear is the smallest conurbation in England, and the need for the countywide co-ordination of transport services is widely recognised. Those services have made a great contribution to the area's economic regeneration. The proposal before the House poses a threat to the Metro system on Tyne and Wear, which is the envy of the world, and to the future expansion and realistic fares structure which that system encompasses. Concessionery travel and special needs transport will also be under threat if secession goes ahead, because of the loss of economies of scale. Deregulation has also had its effect on passenger confidence in the public transport system, which has been a significant casualty.

If the Government want to destroy integration in Tyne and Wear, as would appear to be the case, and to destroy the Metro system, why do they not just send up a squad of SAS men to put a bomb under it? That would be just as effective as the proposal before the House.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I shall be brief because the case for the six metropolitan transport authorities has been highlighted by my hon. Friends. We must also put on the record the objections of the South Yorkshire transport authority, because it prided itself on the service that was provided when the South Yorkshire county council was in being. It was what people wanted, and that was consistently reflected in their votes.

Deregulation was then introduced, and various Acts dispensed with South Yorkshire county council. The Government set up the residuary bodies with the intention that those bodies and the joint authorities should be accountable. The Minister of State said at the time:

"We are faced with an authority being set up to provide a service which, inevitably, is wider than any individual district council. That, of course, is the logic and the rationale behind joint boards for police, fire and transport, so that there can be a co-ordination of policy and an agreement to run what is in essence a public service."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee G*, 12 February 1985, c. 1337.]

The Minister also said:

"We accepted from the beginning the need to co-ordinate certain aspects of public transport, especially support for rail, decisions about subsidy or unprofitable services in different areas, and concessionary fares. None of that is under threat."

That was said in 1985. Now, in 1988, it is all under threat. We have a right, on behalf of our constituents, to ask why it is wrong now when it was right in 1985. What has happened to make the Government change their mind? We think we know, but we would like the Minister to tell us. We think that it is in the Government's mind to destroy public transport and public transport authorities.

What will happen when the levy is introduced, and the district authority says, "Sorry, mate, but we want to spend the money on education or social services, not on transport"? What will happen to the existing infrastructure? The light railway in Sheffield has been mentioned. What is to happen to all the bus stations and the combination of train and bus stations in the area? In south Yorkshire, 40 per cent. of the transport services cross other boundaries, as do many of the railways.

We need time to get over the legislation that has already been introduced, and we need this provision like we need a hole in the head. We are trying to get over the destruction that has been caused by previous policies, and they should not be compounded now. We want to leave matters as they are and wait to see whether the Government were right in the views that they earlier expressed.

Those are some of the matters that concern us, but to allow others to speak I shall stop now and hope that we will return to these matters on another day.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Can the Minister give an assurance that Calderdale will not be squeezed out of the new area? We are desperate because, either way, we shall lose. I will not go over our arguments but will the Minister give a guarantee that Calderdale will be given some form of protection?

9.45 pm

Mr. David Mitchell: I thought that a number of other hon. Members would rise to seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I am happy to have the opportunity to reply to the points that have been raised.

The right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) complained about the short period for consultation. We issued the discussion paper on 22 January, and asked for responses by 15 February. However, we have continued to receive responses subsequent to that date. We took full account of those responses, including a meeting that I had with the Association of Metropolitan Authorities on 2 March. Moreover, as late as 28 March I met Manchester Members of Parliament to hear their views. While I entirely understand why the right hon. Gentleman raised that point, I feel that that will reassure him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller), the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape), the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South and others asked a series of questions about secession. I noticed in particular that the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) claimed that the Department of Transport was actively canvassing secession. That is entirely untrue. Indeed, let me go further and tell the House that when the Transport Act 1985 was going through the House we were told that it would lead to a massive amount of secession. That has not happened: not a single metropolitan district has seceded. The reality has not borne out the assertions made by the hon. Gentleman and many others during our debates in 1985.

Mr. Clelland: Is it not a fact that it is because that situation has not arisen that this measure has been brought before the House tonight? That is what I mean by openly canvassing secession.

Mr. Mitchell: I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that that is not the purpose of the measure. In a moment, I shall give the reasons that lie behind it.

The point that I am trying to make is that we were assured previously of wild rumours of a massive degree of secession, and it has not materialised. One district came to us and made inquiries about the conditions that would be attached to secession, but did not return with further proposals. I have no reason to believe that the measure will lead to secession by districts. I do not anticipate such a development, and I can give any hon. Members who are genuinely worried on that score an assurance that if any authority asks for secession my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will look very carefully at the proposals, and set conditions that will have to be met. On that ground, hon. Members can be reassured that secession will not result.

Mr. Rees: What sort of conditions is the Minister likely to lay down? I do not quite follow him.

Mr. Mitchell: For example, if the passenger transport authority is sustaining a rail network, the condition might well be attached that any district that sought to secede would still have to contribute towards that network. We are seeking to ensure fairness if secession were ever to take place.

Let me repeat, however, that the amendment is not designed to bring about secession. I should like to explain what it is designed to do, and why it has been introduced.

Mr. Snape: Before the Minister does that, may I ask him a question arising from the sentence that he has just uttered? If a district council opted for part secession, continuing to contribute towards the railway network but not towards certain aspects of the bus network, how would the affairs of the passenger transport authority be debated and decided upon? Would that part-seceding district council be allowed to speak and vote on matters on which it had partly seceded?

Mr. Mitchell: If a metropolitan district secedes, it loses its representation and its commitment to being involved in or contributing to the expense of the PTA.

Mr. Favell: This may be slightly outside my hon. Friend's remit, but can he deal with the point raised by the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape)? Why are police and firemen not included under the same provisions? Many Conservative Members who were involved with the old metropolitan counties believe that there should be similar provisions for them. There is no earthly reason why there should be a countywide fire, and possibly police service in Greater Manchester.

Mr. Mitchell: There are considerable differences between the police and fire services and PTAs. My hon. Friend should be aware that the Home Secretary already controls 51 per cent. of the finance of the police, and there are inspectorates for the police and fire services to ensure efficiency and standards of service. So they are very different. This case is left very much to the PTA. In the case of the fire and police service, standards are set, so there is not the same degree of discretion.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Why the change?

Mr. Mitchell: I am coming to that. I want first to deal with the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley, who asked whether accountability could not be increased by directly elected PTAs. As the expenditure of the PTAs amounts to only about 6 per cent. of the expenditure of the districts it would not be realistic or practicable to have an election merely to control such a small expenditure.

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): The Minister spoke about the conditions that the Secretary of State would want to be met for secession and part secession. What would be the position on historic debt charges? The hon. Gentleman answered one example about revenue costs. Tyne and Wear has huge debt charges because of the Metro system. Would the Minister oblige a district council that wanted to secede to make a contribution to historic debt costs?

Mr. Mitchell: It would be wrong for me to give a detailed answer to a hypothetical question, as no district in Tyne and Wear has expressed an interest in seeking to secede under these provisions.

It is right that I should now come to the point that the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) has been pressing me to answer—the central issue of this group of amendments, which is accountability. The Bill provided for the costs arising from PTA policies to be met by precepting on the charge payers at large—broadly, the electorate. However, the PTA membership is not chosen by the electorate and we wish to improve its accountability to the electors by bringing the districts and PTAs closer together in the decision-making process. It is the metropolitan councillors who are directly elected, so the metropolitan district councils must be accountable, and seen to be so, for the expenditure. Under the proposals they will receive the PTA's bills. They can consider them and instruct their representatives on the PTA on the future level of service provision and spending that they want.

Mr. Robert Hughes: They can do that now.

Mr. Mitchell: The big difference is that if the electorate at large receives the bill but does not elect the PTA it can have no direct influence on the PTA's policies. This measure will mean that the district council will receive the bill, consider it and instruct its representatives about what future bills will be acceptable—or unacceptable. Hon. Members may doubt the importance of accountability, but experience with transport services in metropolitan counties before the introduction of precept control is a good example of what happens if there is not adequate accountability.

Mr. Hughes: The Minister must justify why, after the Bill was published, revelation and enthusiasm for accountability suddenly came to him like a bolt of lightning. Did he fall or was he pushed by the Treasury, or by somebody else?

Mr. Mitchell: I can reassure the hon. Gentleman on that point. The reason that it has come about is the recognition that, as events have unfolded, districts have taken little interest in what has been happening with PTAs. The reason they have taken little interest is that they were not going to pick up the bill. The hon. Gentleman and other Opposition Members are annoyed because it means that districts will pick up the bill, scrutinise it, and consider what is or is not acceptable in it.

Mr. Hughes: That will not do. That must have been known to the Minister when the Bill was published. On the face of the Bill was the right for PTAs to be precept-charging authorities. Why, after the Bill was published and when it was being considered in Committee, did he suddenly decide to change the legislation in the way that he now proposes?

Mr. Mitchell: I have just explained to the hon. Gentleman why that is. I must ask him to accept that explanation. Accountability is the gravamen of the whole case. If we look at the period before precept capping came along, we can clearly see the real problem. Subsidising bus services, either by lower fares or by increased services, is popular——

Mrs. Mahon *rose*——

Mr. Mitchell: I shall finish this point and then I shall give way.

Subsidising bus services, either by lower fares or by increased services, is popular with the voter but less popular with the ratepayer. If the voter and the ratepayer are not the same person, there is an almost irresistible temptation to buy popularity by spending the ratepayers' money for them.

Mr. Snape: That is not true.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman knows that that is true.

When we introduce accountability and make the people who are meeting the bill send representatives to decide what size the bill will be, we shall genuinely have accountability and a way of stopping runaway expenditure. If the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East and the House want proof of the validity of that point, I remind them that, before precept control, on average, a shire county spent £5·45 per head of population for bus service subsidies. In Avon, which was very nearly made

[Mr. Mitchell]

into a metropolitan county, the figure was £5·12. As soon as we consider the metropolitan counties and the action that I have been describing took place——

Mrs. Mahon *rose*——

Mr. Mitchell: I just want to finish this one point.

Instead of it being £5 in Manchester, the figure was about £24 per man, woman and child. In Merseyside, it was about £45 per man, woman and child, and in South Yorkshire it was about £59 per man, woman and child. That demonstrates what happens when we do not have accountability. That is why it is right that the House should pass the amendments and give the accountability that is so needed to protect ratepayers in the metropolitan areas of the country.

Mrs. Mahon: The Minister has not answered the question—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has spoken.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 32

DUTY TO SET SUBSTITUTED AMOUNTS

Amendment proposed: No. 23, in page 19, leave out line 13.—*[Mr. David Mitchell.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 337, Noes 222.

Division No. 269] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Rev William
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*

Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd

Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Alun Michael.

Question accordingly agreed to.

It being after Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Orders [22 February and 13 April] and the Resolution [18 April], to put forthwith the Questions on amendments moved by a member of the Government, of which notice had been given, to the end of clause 36.*

Clause 35

INFORMATION

Amendment made: No. 67, in page 21, line 18, leave out 'expiry' and insert 'end'.—*[Mr. Ridley.]*

Clause 36

STANDARD COMMUNITY CHARGE MULTIPLIERS

Amendment made: No. 61, in page 21, line 41, leave out subsection (8) and insert—

'(8) Regulations under this section in their application to a particular financial year (including regulations amending or revoking others) shall not be effective unless they come into force before 1 January in the preceding financial year.'.—*[Mr. Ridley.]*

Further consideration of the Bill adjourned.—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee), to be further considered tomorrow.

Hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Conduct)

Mr. Speaker: Before calling the Leader of the House to move the motion in his name, may I remind the House that the exercise of its disciplinary powers in relation to one of its own Members is one of its most solemn and responsible duties. I trust that the forthcoming debate will be conducted in accordance with the best traditions of this House, and that in reviewing the conduct of a colleague we shall conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the responsibility that we bear.

In order to allow the House the possibility of choosing what alternative penalty, if any, is appropriate in this case, I have selected both of the amendments on the Order Paper. I shall permit a general debate on the motion and the amendments. I draw the attention of the House to the fact that, if it is desired to move both amendments after the conclusion of the debate, it will be necessary for it to end approximately 20 minutes before the allotted time so that there will be an opportunity for both amendments to be taken.

I ask hon. Members to bear these considerations in mind. In view of the long list of right hon. and hon. Members who wish to participate in this debate, I ask for brief speeches.

10.15 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): I beg to move,

That Mr. Ron Brown be suspended from the service of the House for twenty sitting days, and be held responsible for the damage that was sustained by the Mace.

The motion before the House was tabled last night following discussions through the usual channels, and with the agreement of the official Opposition. The points of order yesterday afternoon about the conduct of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) after which I undertook to bring forward a motion showed how seriously the House regards this matter. The agreement to the motion from both sides of the Chamber is a clear sign that the House generally accepts the importance of upholding the authority of the Chair.

The incidents to which the motion refers took place yesterday and the day before, so the House will need little reminding of them. On Monday night, at the end of the proceedings, the hon. Member for Leith threw some papers on to the floor of the Chamber and picked up the Mace. He then released it, and, as it hit the ground, it sustained a certain amount of damage. As you told the House yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the extent of that damage is now being assessed.

Arrangements were made yesterday for the hon. Member to make a personal statement at 3.30 pm about his conduct the previous night. Despite being given ample opportunity by you, Mr. Speaker, to make his statement and apologise, he failed to do so in a way which satisfied the House and had to be asked to withdraw from the Chamber.

I have deliberately given a low-key factual account of what happened, but it is clear that many right hon. and hon. Members are—in my view rightly—very concerned at this behaviour. The conduct of the hon. Member for Leith

showed a deep disrespect for the dignity and position of the Speaker of this House and the authority he exercises on behalf of the House itself.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) was right to point out yesterday that the House is generous to those who make personal statements expressing regret for action taken in the heat of the moment. I am sure that hon. Members can think for themselves of occasions when this has occurred. Very often the House may decide that on these occasions no further action is needed. But I do not think that anyone who heard the hon. Member for Leith yesterday could believe that he regretted his action, and indeed I understand that he has since said as much to the press. That is why the House must take this matter so seriously.

The action which the motion proposes is twofold. The first element is that the hon. Member for Leith should be suspended from the service of the House for 20 sitting days. This is, of course, the level of penalty which would automatically follow on the second occasion in a single Session that the same hon. Member had been named. The second element is that the hon. Member should be held responsible for the damage sustained by the Mace, and should thus pay for the repair work it needs. I do not think many hon. Members would disagree with the view that the hon. Member for Leith's aggravation of his original misconduct by his persistent refusal to offer a satisfactory apology justifies a penalty more severe than that which he would have received yesterday had he been named. Nor do I think any hon. Member would feel it right for the public purse to bear the cost of putting right the damage done to the Mace as a result of the hon. Member's conduct.

It may be helpful if I now say a few words about each of the amendments which you, Mr. Speaker, have selected.

The amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) would reduce the penalty for the hon. Member for Leith to financial liability for the damage caused to the Mace. I say to the hon. Gentleman that, while that might conceivably have been acceptable to the House if the hon. Member for Leith had shown yesterday any genuine regret for what he had done, in the circumstances where he quite clearly has not, for the sake of its own reputation I do not believe the House would or should agree to that amendment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), by contrast, would take a tougher line than would my motion which was agreed through the usual channels. He would ask the House to suspend the hon. Member for Leith without pay for 60 sitting days and insist on an acceptable apology before the suspension was lifted. I greatly sympathise with the concerns behind my hon. Friend's amendment. But I do not think that it would be right to bring forward new disciplinary measures—docking salary and making an end to the suspension dependent on an acceptable apology are novel—in one particular case without a more general consideration of the House's power in this respect. As the House will know, I said at business questions last week that I expect to set up the Procedure Committee very shortly. Indeed, I hope to table the motion next week. It may be that that Committee would wish to carry out a review of our disciplinary procedures and, if so, I am sure that the House would wish to take its comments into account before making any changes.

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. Obviously, the House must take careful note of what he has said concerning the ordinary penalty that this House is accustomed to impose in situations of this kind. Nevertheless, could he state whether there has been an increase in incidents giving rise to suspension in recent years which might lead the House or the Committee that he is setting up to draw the conclusion that that sanction is possibly less adequate than it has been in the past?

Mr. Wakeham: Since the end of the war in 1945, there have been 24 suspensions of five days for hon. Members acting in defiance of the Chair, of which seven have occurred in this Session, since we returned in the autumn.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Does the Leader of the House accept that there have been previous examples of many suspensions being made on the same day, for example, in 1881, a total of 28—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry that Conservative Members are not interested in any form of historical perspective. In 1881, 28 hon. Members were expelled on the same day. Should not the Leader of the House look back a little further to see what happened in the past?

Mr. Wakeham: We are living in the present day and are trying to deal with the present problems. I have to say that seven suspensions in this Session of Parliament, compared with the total of 24 for similar offences for the entire period since the war, is something that I should have thought was of concern to hon. Members on both sides of the House.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would say just this. It is a privilege of which many of us are very conscious to be a Member of this place. That privilege carries the responsibility of respecting the authority the House itself places in the holder of the office of Speaker and of observing the procedures and practices by which we order our discussions. When those are defied, we cannot take the matter lightly, and must act in self-regulation. No amount of regulation by the House can adequately substitute for self-discipline and self-control on the part of each individual hon. Member. But, in the present circumstances, the motion proposes a disciplinary course which I believe the House as a whole will find it right to take. I commend it to the House.

10.23 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): From time to time, because we are overwrought, angry or frustrated, we all make fools of ourselves, including in this place, but we all live in hope of the opportunity to recover our reputations——

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): My old mum says that one must apologise, and I cannot knock that. Clearly, individuals here and elsewhere are worried about this mess. I hope that they are also worried about the working class and what it has to suffer. If you, Mr. Speaker, want an apology, so be it, you can have an apology, but only if one apologises also to the working class for what it has to suffer—fair do's. That is fair enough with me.

Back home in Scotland, back in Leith, there are many unemployed engineering workers. If the Mace has been damaged, they will be willing to repair it. In fact, they will give you a new one, Mr. Speaker. That is a guarantee to you. If you are worried about a bauble, as Cromwell said,

[Mr. Ron Brown]

you are worried about nothing. What is important is this country. It is important because it belongs to us. It does not belong to certain individuals in this place. Democracy will be fought for outside this place. I——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that it would be more appropriate if the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) sought to make a speech.

Mr. Brown: I know that you are trying to protect me, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, if we say and do certain things, we must accept the consequence. Please pass on the bill if I have offended you.

Mr. Dobson: I shall not attempt to reply to the points made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown). I expect that he will be called to speak in the debate.

Late on Monday evening, the hon. Member for Leith picked up the Mace, for whatever reason, dropped it and damaged it. The following morning, the Opposition Chief Whip and Deputy Chief Whip had a meeting with the hon. Gentleman and explained to him that by custom in this place he could make a personal statement apologising for what he had done, but that the terms of the statement had to be agreed with you, Mr. Speaker. This he agreed to do. He agreed also to make good the damage to the Mace. He was asked to stand by in his office while it was discovered what terms of apology would be acceptable to you, Mr. Speaker. This was done particularly as it was not a matter in which a personal statement about another Member was concerned. It was a matter that was related directly to your authority.

Later the hon. Member for Leith could not be found. He got in contact with the Opposition Chief Whip at 3.25 pm, five minutes before he would have had to make the apology if he chose to do so. He was given a copy of wording which had been agreed by you, Mr. Speaker, and he told the Opposition Chief Whip that he would make the apology in those terms. Lest anyone feels that the terms suggested were personally humiliating, I shall read them out:

"I wish to make a personal statement, Mr. Speaker. I regret my action last night in regard to the Mace, and I apologise unreservedly to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the House for what occurred. I accept responsibility for any damage that was sustained by the Mace."

You duly gave the hon. Member for Leith no fewer than nine opportunities to make that apology in the terms agreed with you, Mr. Speaker, and this he failed to do. You asked him to leave the Chamber and he did.

There can be no question of leaving it at that. Such behaviour would not be acceptable in any other organisation and it is not acceptable here. Members are elected to this House to represent the people in their constituencies. Most of that representation is done by word. That is partly by the written word but mainly in here by the spoken word. Before words can have influence, they must be heeded. Before words can be heeded, they must be heard. For them to be heard, there must be order. Without rules of order and without someone to sustain and apply those rules, there can be neither debate nor opportunity to influence those outside this place who hear or read what we have said.

It is not only Parliament that has rules for the conduct of its business. Every organisation has such rules because without them organisations cannot function. Nowhere is this more true than in the Labour and trade union movement. Every trade union has a rule book, and most of them spell out what can and cannot be done at meetings if the views of the members are to prevail. All grown-up people know that such rules exist and that they must be accepted, and that if they are not, those who breach them must take the consequences. A great deal of our childhood is taken up by learning just that.

I shall give two examples drawn from the heart of the Labour movement to illustrate what I am trying to say. The rule book of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, of which the hon. Member for Leith is a member, sets out the duties of presidents in the union, from branch presidents to national presidents. The first duty of the branch president in the AEU rule book is to preside over all meetings and to see that the business is conducted with propriety and order. For another example I draw upon Citrine's famous book "ABC of Chairmanship" which spells out that if any delegate to the Trades Union Congress refuses to obey the president when called to order he or she shall be expelled from the hall and allowed back in only if he or she expresses regret and the delegates consent to his or her return.

That springs from the simple recognition by ordinary working people over the years that the proper and orderly conduct of business is necessary if their interests are to be promoted. There is nothing soft, wet or weak about such an approach. Quite the reverse; it requires self-control, self-discipline and team work. Perhaps we should remember Hemingway's definition of guts, which he described as "grace under pressure."

Of course, the House of Commons is not always orderly. Many of us, including me, from time to time are ill-disciplined. When this place is disorderly or ill-disciplined, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) pointed out, it is only reflecting what has happened many times in the past. There are many things wrong with this place that Opposition Members would like to see changed. We would like to change the policies of the Government. We would like to change the Government. We would like to see changes in the procedures of this place and make all Governments more accountable. We would like to see far-reaching changes in the working practices here. However, I know of no one who wishes to get rid of the rules that are designed to secure a hearing for all or who wishes to diminish the authority of Mr. Speaker to help to achieve that.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Now that my hon. Friend has got on to the question of working practices in the House, will he take into account the fact that in this quaint little club there are practices that allow Members of Parliament to turn up for work when it suits them without clocking on? It allows Members of Parliament, such as Tory Members, to go on jaunts to the Botha regime, paid for by that evil system. It allows many Tory Members in particular to make money on the side by moonlighting with four, five or six different jobs. Is it not time that the Opposition Front Bench concentrated on those issues instead of attacking one of its own?

Mr. Dobson: I agree with many of the criticisms that my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has

levelled at this place and at some Tory Members. However, I do not think that what he is suggesting is the way to go about changing matters.

We have a Government—I hope that my hon. Friend will agree with me—who are arrogant with power. They are often unwilling to answer our points. They ignore what we believe to be the sufferings of many of our people. We all find that very frustrating, and our frustration manifests itself in many ways. People occasionally, on the spur of the moment, may do foolish things or behave in a disorderly way. However, that does not mean that they care more about what is happening to our country or that they are working harder in the House than others to try to put things right.

Day in and day out, most Opposition Members are doing their hardest to represent their constituencies, to expose what is wrong with the Government and to propose alternatives to what is happening to our country. They try to make the most of the opportunities available in this place. They try to be sensible, trenchant, committed and coherent. For those qualities to show through, we need a House of Commons that is orderly, or usually orderly. For it to be orderly, we need to sustain the authority of the Chair, and the only way in which we can do that tonight is by voting for the motion and rejecting the two amendments.

[Mr. Dobson]

10.35 pm

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): A great deal of what has been said by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) must be agreed by the whole House. I would respectfully submit, however, that the bizarre actions of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) cannot be seen wholly in isolation. They were but one more instance of a deterioration in the standards of behaviour in this place which has manifested itself in the last few months. Therefore, what the hon. Gentleman did —I must say this in fairness—cannot wholly be set apart from what went before.

There is no escape for any of us who have wittingly or even unwittingly made a contribution to this rising tide of disorder. It is one of life's ironies that we do not always see where our own behaviour is leading us. After this latest episode we should be able to see it all too clearly.

Let us speak plainly. For some time there have been those in our midst—only a few, I believe—who have been openly advocating the disruption of Parliament as a means to a political end. Are they not as much to blame as the hon. Member for Leith?

I should like to keep this in perspective. Down the years, disruptive behaviour and even violence have not been unknown in this place. There were many instances in the last century and in this of disorder and violence.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I am one of those to whom the right hon. Gentleman has referred. If the argument is to be generalised, one has to take into account other considerations. I happen to think that it should not be generalised tonight. There is the question of the organised mendacity of others if the right hon. Gentleman intends to make generalisations.

Sir Bernard Braine: The hon. Gentleman has been in the House long enough to know that to intervene at the beginning of an argument is often a waste of time. If he would hear what I have to say, I think that at the end of it he, a formidable parliamentarian in his own right, would understand what I am driving at.

In 1893, during the 47th sitting on the Home Rule Bill of that year, there was not only complete uproar but violence. According to one report, when it was all over, the Floor of the Chamber was found to be strewn with scarf pins and artificial teeth. But always in the past the overwhelming majority drew back from the brink. Extremist behaviour was curbed and the outside world continued to admire the way in which contrary views could be expressed here with lucidity, with feeling and even on some occasions with passion.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth) *rose*—

Sir Bernard Braine: I shall not give way. This is a short debate and I want to say something which I hope is important. I trust that my hon. Friend will understand.

There is no need for disruptive behaviour in this place. There are those amongst us who know that in the voicing of grievances and in the righting of wrongs there are procedural devices by which the astute can get results. I have learnt a few of the tricks myself in my time. I know of no greater authority on procedure than my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hislop). In this Parliament no fewer than seven hon. Members have been suspended, and there is open talk in some quarters of further disruption of our proceedings.

I am not making excuses for the hon. Member for Leith. If his defiance of the norms of decent parliamentary behaviour continues, he must be dealt with effectively. One of the greatest of parliamentarians, Edmund Burke, held:

> "Magnanimity in politics is not seldom the truest wisdom".

That is generally good advice, but there is a point at which we have to say that this House is always more important than the sum total of those who constitute it at any one time.

Governments come and go. Ministers are vested with a little brief authority. None of us is master here. We are all trustees for the nation, for those who have gone before and for those who are still unborn. Running off with the Mace, throwing it down or dropping it are acts of violence. That "bauble", as Oliver Cromwell referred to it contemptuously, symbolises in one sense the authority which you, Mr. Speaker, derive from the Sovereign. In a wider sense, it symbolises everything that we represent here and seek to defend—a system which facilitates change within a framework of order and proper respect for continuity. To treat the Mace with contempt is to treat the system with contempt, and that is to treat all of us and those who elected us to this place with contempt. It fires a shot at the governing party, but, more than that, it fires a shot at all political parties. It is a direct challenge to the authority of the Chair, and that is what is intended.

You have a difficult enough task, Mr. Speaker, in holding a fair balance between parties and between strongly expressed, opposing and sincerely held points of view. Precisely because you are the protector of our rights in this place, you are entitled to have our support at all times.

I remember not so many years ago a formidable figure in the Liberal party—the late Mr. Clement Davies—who, in the midst of a disruptive scene when certain elements were attacking the Chair, silenced the House by saying, "In this country people do not like the side that kicks a referee." If we continue kicking the referee, as some hon. Members seek to do, the game is not worth playing and the public will lose interest. There will be great anger. We must stop the rot while the time is right.

Whatever our differences, the House will be united on that. You have powers, Mr. Speaker. You should use them. If they are not sufficient in the light of future misbehaviour, the House can give you extra powers. I am convinced that the House is about to draw back from the brink and, therefore, I argue that we should accept the motion moved by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. That should do the trick. I hope that this short debate will illustrate that the House of Commons intends to be master in its own house.

10.43 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I do not want to dwell at length on the actions of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown), which have been described by the Leader of the House and the hon. Member fo Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). His abuse of the Mace—the symbol of your authority, Mr. Speaker—and pathetic performance yesterday speak for themseives and merit at least the sanction proposed in the motion moved by the Leader of the House.

I welcome the fact that the right hon. Gentleman has indicated his opposition to the fiscal penalty proposed by the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth). Before embarking on the imposition of fiscal penalties on people, it is important that we think carefully. I welcome the announcement that the Procedure Committee will consider these matters. Certain rules of natural justice, which I hope that the Committee will address, should be observed.

My right hon. and hon. Friends uphold, above all, the concept of parliamentary democracy. Like the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, we believe that this is a place where political issues are debated. It greatly distresses us when organised barracking drowns out free speech, however unpalatable the views expressed.

Equally, it distresses us when parties represented in the House suggest outside the House illegal methods of challenging laws passed by the House. If we aspire, as all of us in the various parties do, to come to government and pass laws ourselves, we expect the country at large to obey those laws. That is the essence of parliamentary democracy. We very much regret, therefore, the challenge to parliamentary democracy and to your office, Mr. Speaker, mounted by the hon. Member for Leith, and we support the Leader of the House's motion.

Finally, I believe that there are other ways in which parliamentary democracy can be undermined. The essence of civilised democracy is that the rights of minorities are respected. When a Government say that they will carry on regardless and do not heed the dissenting voices, even within their own ranks, that quality of listening to minorities—the essence of parliamentary democracy—is undermined.

The institutions of the House are attacked when the Government opt for the grandeur of the stage-managed press conference instead of coming to answer hon. Members at the Dispatch Box. While we deal with the activities of the hon. Member for Leith, we should remember that there are various ways of undermining parliamentary democracy.

10.47 pm

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): It is clear that both sides of the House are largely united in condemning the disgraceful events that have led to this debate on the conduct of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown). If you, Mr. Speaker, had been led yesterday simply to name him and he had withdrawn from the House for no more than five days, that would scarcely have been sufficient penalty for the gravity of his offence. We are grateful to you, therefore, for the opportunity to debate the matter more widely.

It is also important to note that the debate provides an opportunity for the House to focus on a situation that has been causing growing impatience both inside and outside the House. No one gainsays that there must be a place in politics for passion, but we all agree that there is no place in the House for deliberate, cold-blooded disruption of democratic processes.

That is why it is right to reinforce some of the figures that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House gave by reminding the House that between 1974 and 1980—a period largely dominated by a Labour Government who could not really be described as popular—there were no suspensions in this place. Since 1981, there have been 18. I am glad to say that none of those have come from the party to which I have the honour to belong.

You, Mr. Speaker, know that many of my hon. Friends have been deeply angered by the persistent challenges to your authority. That is why I welcome what my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has said about the re-establishment of the Procedure Committee for which many of us have been pressing for a long time. If our Standing Orders need to be reinforced, that is the right way to go about it. If the penalties are inadequate, that is the right place to debate how much stronger they should be made. But if the House then decides that the Chair needs stronger powers, the purpose of those powers will not be to suppress opposition or to create martyrs, because it is a mistake in politics to do either of those things.

In the days of John Wilkes, the occupant of the Chair, Mr. Speaker Onslow, once found himself burnt in effigy on Tower Hill by the street politicians of the day. Because they thought that they were defending a martyr, they raised the cry of, "Wilkes and liberty." However, this evening we are not talking about liberty; we are talking about licence. There is no doubt that the abuse of his position by the hon. Member for Leith makes it necessary that his licence should be withdrawn, as the motion proposes.

10.49 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I should like to move my amendment which would——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall ask the hon. Gentleman to move his amendment at the end. This is a general debate.

Mr. Cryer: I hope that the House will support my amendment and I shall say briefly why. A principal reason is that the atmosphere of the House yesterday was not the cosy, still atmosphere that some hon. Members imply in their condemnation. There was a great deal of shouting and bellowing from the pinstriped hooligans on the Tory Benches, and that must be taken into account. When hon. Members talk about undermining democracy, they would do well to remember that Peter Wright wrote more about that in MI5 than whatever could have conceivably happened in this place.

This place rests on precedent. "Erskine May" is virtually a list of them—a thick list. We can recall, for example, the precedent of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) on the night when he came down, took up the Mace and started whirling it around. He was forced to put it back by the moderate Jim Prior who presumably did not think that that was the way forward for the Conservative party. The right hon. Gentleman apologised the following day and no more was heard about it. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] The right hon. Gentleman was heard in silence. We are considering the difference between the two cases. The apology from my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) was less than fulsome, but it was repeated twice —*[Interruption.]* Yet, the House is saying that for a fumbled apology my hon. Friend should be suspended for 20 days.

There is a further precedent for this resolution. On Monday 1 November 1976, the House established a Select Committee to examine the conduct of three hon. Members. The report was considered on 26 July and one

[Mr. Cryer]

of the hon. Members subsequently resigned. Those three had consistently over several years used their position as Members of the House for personal financial gain in approaches to Ministers and public bodies, and in asking questions and raising issues in the House. Those financial gains were never disclosed. It would be fair to say that all three were in the pocket of J. G. L. Poulson.

As I have mentioned, one resigned. Albert Roberts and Reginald Maudling faced a similar resolution to this one. What were the precedents then? Were a large number of Conservatives waiting for blood, as is obviously the case tonight? The resolution to agree with the Select Committee report—a Select Committee established and approved by the House—was defeated and an amendment was inserted simply to "take note" of the report. Resolutions to suspend the two for six months without pay were defeated by massive majorities of about 200. After a career of abusing the House for several years, those two hon. Members got off scot-free, despite being involved in one of the widest cases of local and national government corruption in the 20th century.

The hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) said:

"We should realise, looking back over the period in question, which is 13 to 14 years, that there are few of us who can say that we have done everything completely as we might have wished or who have not made the odd mistake. If our colleagues have erred in any judgment, they have suffered more than enough from the publicity following the Report and during previous years when their names were constantly in the headlines.

We can serve the House best and show understanding best by taking note and leaving the matter there."—[*Official Report*, 26 July 1977; Vol. 936 c. 438.]

I recall that you, Mr. Speaker were convinced by that call for consideration and understanding, and voted for the suggestion of the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South. I urge the House to have the same compassion and understanding that the hon. Gentleman had on that occasion.

The truth of the matter is that we are here dealing with two very minor incidents compared with that on 26 July 1977. The House would do well to bear that fact in mind and support my amendment, which allows for a "take note" motion as on 26 July and for the costs of repairing the Mace to be charged to my hon. Friend the Member for Leith.

10.55 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): This is a matter of the utmost gravity, as seems to be widely agreed throughout the House, though I have to say that what has just been said by the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) suggests that he does not understand its gravity.

We must all begin from the point that the Mace symbolises not only the House itself but your authority, Mr. Speaker. The House cannot let go unrecognised or unpunished the actions of a Member who lifts the Mace and drops it or throws it to the floor and damages it. That action goes beyond the mere damage done to the Mace. It suggests an attitude to the House and to your authority, Mr. Speaker, that is totally unacceptable.

We are not looking at this action in isolation, because it must be seen in the context of something that has already been mentioned this evening—a growing incidence of such activities in the House. It is against that background that the activities of the hon. Member for Edinburgh Leith (Mr. Brown) must be judged.

Reference must also be made to the events in the House yesterday. When the hon. Member for Leith was given opportunity to apologise to the House, he deliberately refused that opportunity and set out systematically to undermine the authority of the Chair. His use of the phrase

"I did not write this rubbish."—[*Official Report*, 19 April 1988; Vol. 131, c. 676.]

when referring to the agreed apology, sums up well the attitude of the hon. Member to yourself, Mr. Speaker, to the Chair, and to the House. In that respect, the hon. Gentleman's attitude and activities must be regarded as completely unacceptable.

There is a motion before the House in the name of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and the House should be grateful for the fact the Opposition have seen fit to support it. I do not believe that it goes far enough. One of the main reasons is that it seeks merely to suspend the hon. Gentleman for 20 days, with no effect on his pay.

I shall now answer the point made by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. He told the House that we are to have a Procedure Committee and that it will consider the matter before us. In the light of what has happened in the past two days, I believe that it is the right and the duty of the House to judge the actions of the hon. Member for Leith and to give the Procedure Committee guidance on the action that it should take, by accepting the terms of my amendment. That would tell the Committee, under the authority of the House, that the House expects the penalties available to you, Mr. Speaker, to be much more severe in future.

If we were to accept the motion in the name of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, supported by the Opposition Front Bench, the hon. Member for Leith, would be suspended, yes, but he would be able to return to the service of the House without ever having given an apology to the House for what he did. I view that as completely unacceptable. My amendment, in requiring from the hon. Gentleman an apology that is acceptable to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the House before he is allowed to return, is the only basis on which we can allow him to return. I hope that the House will consider that proposal most seriously in determining how it votes this evening.

10.58 pm

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): This is a sad occasion for the House of Commons, and any right hon. or hon. Gentleman who takes pleasure from this debate must have a perverted sense of justice. It is at moments like this that I never envy a judge or magistrate having to sit in judgment on his fellow men. I do not enjoy what is happening in the House tonight, and I suspect strongly that there are a great many right hon. and hon. Members on these Benches and in all quarters of the House who share my sadness that we have to sit in judgment on one of our colleagues.

When I go into the Division Lobby, as I will, it will be in support of the motion. I say to my colleagues who are in doubt that this is a Labour party motion—an Opposition motion—as much as it is a Government motion. When I go into the Lobby to support the motion I shall do so, not to punish my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown), but to show my personal

displeasure—I can put it in no other words—at his conduct yesterday and the day before. The one thing that I shall not do is regard myself as going into the Lobby along with Conservative Members: I shall not see it in that light. This is, as I have said, as much a Labour as a Government motion. I shall also see myself, Mr. Speaker, as supporting you and the Chair.

I say openly and honestly that I have not always done that. I have never voted against a Speaker, but on occasions I have deliberately abstained. There have been times when I have played my part in disrupting the proceedings of the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson)—the shadow Leader of the House—made the telling point that, by the very nature of the Chamber, the issues with which we deal are bound, at one time or another, to result in our feelings spilling over so that we do things that we might not have done in our calmer moments.

Let me inject a lighter note into the few remarks that I wish to make. A comparison was drawn between my hon. Friend the Member for Leith and the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), and I should like to take the comparison a bit further. After the right hon. Member for Henley had waved the Mace in the House, Mr. Speaker Thomas suspended the sitting and refused to allow him to make his apology there and then. That was why the right hon. Gentleman had to come back and apologise the following day. But look at what has happened to the right hon. Gentleman. He went on to become a Cabinet Minister, and he is now challenging others for the position of leader of his party. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Leith should give some further consideration to the apology that he refused to make yesterday.

Some of my colleagues—with most of whom I have had a lifelong friendship—now take the view that disruption should lead to destruction. Anyone who holds that view should dismiss it from his thoughts. We as a Labour movement have fought long and hard to represent our people here in this Chamber. If we destroy this place, we have no place left in which to voice the fears, worries and concerns of the people whom we represent.

Some of my hon. Friends may say, "Let us disregard this place and take the argument to the people." All right: we will follow that through. We take the argument to the people and we convince them: where do we go then? We will have no place left for legislation.

I caution all my hon. Friends who think that the way to unseat the Government—the way to prosecute our case—is to disrupt and destroy the Chamber to think long and carefully about where that process ends. It ends where it began: it ends without representation for the very people whom we are sent here to represent.

11.3 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): As a new boy—a member of the new intake—I found that it seemed almost like normal behaviour over the past 10 months to see Member after Member named by you, Mr. Speaker, for disruption in the House. It was with some surprise that I found that not a single hon. Member needed to be named and dismissed from the service of the House between 1974 and 1980.

In 1981 the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) found a method of disrupting this place and had to be named. The rot started there, and unfortunately the next person to decide that this was a good way of getting his name into the newspapers was none other than the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) who was dismissed from the service of the House not once, but twice. It is interesting to note that on both those occasions, Mr. Speaker Thomas did not need to call a vote. the hon. Gentleman was immediately suspended on the unanimous verbal vote of the whole House.

Now, time after time, it is necessary to suspend the business of the House for 15 minutes or more at a time, so that some hon. Member can get his name in the papers. It is easy to be out of order by mistake in this place. It could be judged a legitimate parliamentary tactic to be deliberately out of order, but what cannot be sustained is that you should be challenged, Mr. Speaker, when you rule an hon. Member out of order. There are parliamentary tactics available to us for attacking our opponents, but we should never attack the Chair.

The best form of discipline is self-discipline. It would be good if all hon. Members understood that, but clearly they do not. I shall certainly support the call of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) for the hon. Member for Leith to be suspended for a long period, to lose his salary and to have to apologise to the Chair before he returns.

11.7 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Tonight the House is sitting, as you said, Mr. Speaker, in a judicial capacity. We are the prosecution, the judge and the jury, and the executioner stands in the Serjeant at Arms' Box.

This is a House of Commons matter, on which we should all be free to vote. I am deeply uneasy about a sentence negotiated between the two Front Benches, for the simple reason that, on matters of this sort, every hon. Member must reach a judgment. *[Interruption.]* I hope that the House will listen to my argument, because I am not in favour of hon. Members getting themselves expelled from the House.

If I had ever been asked by anyone—I have not—I should have advised them that there were other ways of getting their case across—in questions, speeches, motions, points of order, and even in motions of censure against the Speaker. On one occasion I moved such a motion, which was well in order. Those who say that hon. Members must support the Speaker forget that there is an ultimate right to move a motion against him if that is the right thing to do.

At the same time, I know that there is a degree of anger about what is happening in this country and about the violence that is being perpetrated against our constituents by the Conservative party. That leads to much anger among hon. Members. The question for us tonight is solely what we should do about it.

I want to put a simple point before the House. We are a representative body and our duty is to those who sent us here and not to each other—except in one special context. We hold our privileges on behalf of those who sent us here. If an hon. Member says, "I do not want the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith back until he has done this or that," he is assuming the rights of my hon. Friend's constituents. No hon. Member is in the House because other hon. Members approve of him. The day that we accept that the House can remove an hon. Member will be the day that we destroy parliamentary democracy.

[Mr. Tony Benn]

I say that with some feeling, because, historically, some hon. Members have been in the most severe breach of duty. I refer to hon. Members elected on one party ticket who remain in the House and change their allegiance. I regard that as a profound betrayal of their true responsibility to their constituents. In that regard, I shall make a reference that is of special relevance. My father was the Liberal Member for Leith. The day that he joined the Labour party he applied for the Chiltern Hundreds and left the House. Unlike the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), he did not believe that it was right to be elected as a Liberal Member and remain in the House as a Labour one.

If we remove my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) we are punishing not him —except financially—but his constituents. I do not think that the House has the right to remove hon. Members. I say that with some feeling, because I was expelled from the House by the House on the most ludicrous ground of peerage. I was an elected Member for 10 years, and the same sort of hon. Member who will troop through the Lobby to get rid of my hon. Friend, denied the electors of Bristol—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Every hon. Member should have a right to say what he wishes, provided it is in order, and the right hon. Gentleman is in order.

Mr. Benn: I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for supporting what I am saying. *[Laughter.]* When the passions of hon. Members subside, it may be that the high excitement tonight would not look so good if a precedent were to be created and became part of the procedure of the House.

It is true that my hon. Friend the Member for Leith broke the rules of the House, but they are not the same as the basic principles of parliamentary democracy; they are the rules of the club. If parliamentary democracy depended on a bit of metal on the Table, we would all be in trouble.

If one looks at the history of disorder, one sees that there are some formidable precedents. The King came here and Mr. Speaker Lenthall had to deal with him. Cromwell removed the bauble. The home rule debates of the 1880s led to the first invention of a closure. There was no English word for it, so the French word, "clôture" had to be used, and then we moved to "guillotine" and other French words. It was unknown in our history to limit debate.

Before the war, Beckett swung the Mace about and was put in the Clock Tower. As there have been so many references to the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) I shall not add to them. Manny Shinwell—who, on his 100th birthday, was paid a special tribute in the House of Lords—crossed the Floor of the House and struck Commander Bower because he thought that he had made an anti-Semitic remark. In my time, George Wigg struck a Tory Member in the precincts of the House. Bernadette Devlin struck Reginald Maudling. *Private Eye* said that she nearly woke him up.

The reality is that we can become awfully pompous about disorder in the House. I shall tell one brief true story concerning my former hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West, Leslie Hale and the then Chairman of Ways and Means, Sir Charles MacAndrew. Leslie was short and red faced and Sir Charles MacAndrew was tall and severe with white hair that looked like a wig. One night, in the middle of a Committee stage, Leslie Hale was speaking. MacAndrew told him to withdraw a remark. Hale said he would not. MacAndrew said "Are you challenging my ruling?" Hale said, "Yes, I am." Sir Charles MacAndrew said, "I shall ask you to leave." Hale said, "I will not leave." Then it all faded away. I said to Leslie Hale afterwards, "What happened?" and he said, "Charlie MacAndrew came up to me and said, 'I have guests in the Gallery tonight Leslie. Will you challenge one of my rulings?'."

That is an absolutely true story—*[Interruption.]* Dare I say it, there is a lot of synthetic indignation and the day will come when we will bring children round and say, "That is where it happened."

You, Mr. Speaker, have at your disposal the power to suspend the sitting. You can take an idea from the other place—not a Chamber which I like—which adopts the practice of moving that "the noble Lord be no longer heard." That is a disciplinary measure. You, Mr. Speaker, could rely on pressure from colleagues. As you look at the angry faces on our Benches, you know that whatever the House does to my hon. Friend is nothing to the fate that awaits him when my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition gets at him when he returns.

Are you, Mr. Speaker, really saying that this is the end of parliamentary democracy? It is nothing of the kind. In my opinion, my hon. Friend did a silly thing. I have told him that tonight, he should get up, read the apology, say nothing and withdraw. I gave him that advice because the House is happy always to accept it.

I beg the House tonight, in high passion with some entertainment value added, not to go through the Lobby and throw out a Member of this House for four weeks for what, however we judge it, was a minor offence. It was not a pre-arranged offence, it was nothing to do with a plan of disruption discussed secretly by hon. Members. It was nothing of the kind.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Benn: No. I am on my last words.

I appeal to hon. Members to have a sense of proportion about the whole matter.

Mr. Faulds: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Benn: I shall finish on these words, if I am allowed to get them out. I am depending on you, Mr. Speaker to protect me from my hon. Friend.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Member is not giving way.

Mr. Benn: I am not giving way to my hon. Friend, but if he gets slung out, I will support him. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Faulds: It is parliamentary convention for hon. Members to give way.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman said that he was not giving way.

Mr. Benn: I am not giving way only because, knowing my hon. Friend very well, he might make it worse. Therefore, I hope that the House will allow me to say my last sentence.

Have a sense of proportion. My hon. Friend the Member for Leith has done something for which I fear later his colleagues will exact a terrible price. I shall make a similar speech when the moment comes. Tonight, the House has made its point and I suggest that we leave it with two speeches, we do not go into the Lobbies, and we let it pass into the history of the Chamber along with more dangerous and sensational events.

11.18 pm

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): We have just heard a delightful speech, a tour de force, a patrician view. Those who live cocooned in that kind of political and physical comfort often can be much more detached, if not semi-detached, about these affairs.

I suggest to the House that there is an underlying seriousness. The House knows perfectly well that this is a disagreeable and uncomfortable occasion that we would much rather do without. At least we have had the advantage of the debate being introduced by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and responded to by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) in a manner which has elevated it as much as possible in these circumstances.

I ask the House to consider only two points. They may be dull and pedestrian. They do not have the panache and the glamour of the preceding speech, but they are possibly closer to the working-day reality of the House. The Mace exerts an almost mesmerising attraction for politicians from time to time. Such behaviour has occurred not just since the last war. It occurred in the interval between the two wars when a Mr. Forgan and a Mr. Beckett took charge of the Mace.

The Mace represents something of the utmost significance to the House. There are very few institutions to which we belong where there are not symbols that command collegiate respect. Therefore, the handling of the Mace is naturally not a matter of farce or dismissive comment. It is symbolic because of its wider implications.

I speak in all charity when I say to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) that all hon. Members are fighting their corner and that we have a pretty dismissive view of the judgment of our fellow Members. The hon. Gentleman is being arraigned on a question of judgment, certainly not on a question of honour. When one recalls the opportunity for the apology, it was the hon. Gentleman's unwillingness to abide by an unconditional agreement that worried me. The hon. Gentleman is not the only guilty one, but I do not intend to widen the debate.

To put it in as neutral terms as I can contrive, there has grown up over some time an increasing reluctance to accept Mr. Speaker's ruling, the judgment of the Chair, in a total and complete fashion, without any qualification whatsoever. I have watched—I must admit, reminiscent of my own days in the ranks of the Army, with some envy—the development of dumb insolence into an art form. That cannot continue. I promise the House that that kind of development is corrosive of authority and that eventually we shall all pay for it.

That brings me to the point that was so eloquently made by the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing). The rules, orders and conventions, and the symbols that represent them that are evident in this House, are not the manufacture of the Treasury Bench. They are the manufacture of the House of Commons over the decades, generations and centuries. Above all, they have been of value to unfashionable minorities—minorities who came here to crusade. When Red Clydesiders came to this House of Commons they did not come to it to destroy its institutions. They came to use them. To the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who is muttering away, I say that if he can leave this institution with the reputation of Jimmy Maxton, he will have done pretty well by Socialism and pretty well by radicalism.

We must defend the Orders of the House, not to be on the side of the establishment but to protect essentially minority interests. That can be done only if we show a much more increased and a much more evident respect for authority both in this context and over a much wider field.

11.23 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I have some sympathy with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) who, as his neighbour the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) pointed out yesterday, suffered an industrial injury which, in the context of a motion for the Adjournment of the House on a matter relating to supplementary benefit appeals, led to his misuse of the Mace.

I have equal sympathy with you, Mr. Speaker, in your endeavours, with patience and good humour, to hold hon. Members to the Standing Orders of this House and to the precedents of "Erskine May". A massive Tory majority is being used not moderately, as we would expect, to unite the nation but to tear us all asunder. It seems determined to create not one nation among our people but a series of different nations and a series of mini-statelets consisting of the poor, the oppressed and the bewildered who, unable to fend for themselves, find a stony-faced Government bearing down upon them. They look to Parliament to redress their grievances and to protect their interests as best it can.

Faced with an onslaught on the living standards of those who sent Labour Members to Parliament—the onslaught on our National Health Service, on those who are entitled to social security, on those who have not gained what they thought they might gain under the Budget, and on those who are the victims of an iniquitous and divisive Government, with its poll tax—faced with these monumental and ravaging attacks, it is hardly surprising that discipline breaks down, frustration creeps in, and that frustration should express itself in aggressive ways and manners inappropriate to this House.

However, to explain how these things happen is not to justify them happening. However high ran the emotions of the hon. Member for Leith on Monday evening, the situation could not justify his refusal to make a personal statement to this House on the following day, when his emotions had cooled and when he had had an ample period for reflection. Indeed, those hon. Members who are in the Chamber tonight, and who were in the Chamber yesterday, noted how, with firmness but forebearance, you, Mr. Speaker, gave the hon. Gentleman every opportunity to make the statement which you had given him leave to make. His failure to do so brought contempt upon the Chair, and also brought contempt upon our parliamentary proceedings.

It is, of course, a parliamentary privilege to make a personal statement uninterrupted, which is without intervention or debate. As the hon. Member for Hornsey

[Mr. Stuart Bell]

and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) stated yesterday, the House will listen with indulgence and sympathy to those who have been carried away in the heat of the moment. However, privilege—parliamentary privilege—goes to the heart of our proceedings. The privilege to speak freely on any subject is a privilege that we claim from the Monarch at the beginning of each Parliamentary Session.

I advise my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) that this House has exclusive control over its own proceedings, and has seen the enhancement of our parliamentary democracy since the time of William and Mary, many years ago. It was Mr. Justice Coke—if I might tell the right hon. Member for Chesterfield—who in 1565 noted:

"Whatever matter arises concerning either House of Parliament ought to be examined, discussed and adjudged in that House to which it relates and not elsewhere".

Therefore, if power and privilege rest with us, so too does responsibility. It is a responsibility, Mr. Speaker, we owe to you in the Chair. We owe it to you to uphold the authority of the Chair. It is a responsibility that we bear to the British people that the Executive should be held to account, that its policies should be probed and questioned, that hon. Members should be kept on their toes and feel understandably nervous at the Dispatch Box.

Any failure of this House to act responsibly towards a Member who has brought it into disrepute demeans the House and its reputation and diminishes it in the eyes of the public. What signal do we send to our collective electorate if we are unable to control the conduct of our own affairs?

I advise Labour Members that we are in a privileged position. We are in the vanguard of the Labour movement. We represent millions of voters out there in the field. If we act responsibly, they will respond to us. For that reason, I support the motion.

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the next hon. Member, may I draw attention to what I said at the beginning of the debate. If the House desires to have two votes on this matter, we should be thinking about drawing the debate to a close.

11.29 pm

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): Perhaps there was a misunderstanding yesterday about what was meant by a personal statement. Certainly I knew what I intended to say, even though you, Mr. Speaker may have thought differently. That is in the past. I make it clear to the House that, if there is any damage to the Mace, it will be paid for by myself and my friends back home—the members of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers—who are quite happy to do what they can to make everything better, if that is what you want. They will certainly look at the Mace simply because it symbolises so much to so many hon. Members, on both sides of the House. We recognise that such things are important to certain hon. Members.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, you have that as a guarantee from me, but you still know my strength of feeling, bearing in mind what is happening to working class people, not just in Scotland but in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. That should be borne in mind. That is not a political statement, but a statement that I make as the representative of Leith. I feel strongly about many things that have happened repeatedly since 1979.

11.30 pm

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): The only reason I intervene is that I am probably the only Conservative Member who knows the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) well. The hon. Gentleman and I have paired for the last nine years—*[Laughter.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It will not escape the notice of my hon. Friends and Opposition Members that I therefore have something of a vested interest in what the House decides. However, I hope that you, Mr. Speaker, will accept that that is not the reason why I intervene. I do so because having known the hon. Gentleman for nine years and having got to know him quite well, I know him to be someone for whose political views I have absolutely no time at all and whose judgment I sometimes question politically.

I seldom agree wholeheartedly with the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who has urged the hon. Gentleman to apologise, as I did at some length last night. I have intervened because I should like the House, and especially my hon. Friends, to take into account the fact that, having got to know the hon. Gentleman quite well, I find him to be someone of absolute integrity and total honesty. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), the former Leader of the House said, this is not a question of the hon. Gentleman's honour, it is a question of his judgment. In my opinion, his judgment is appalling.

No one in the House would feel otherwise than that your authority, Mr. Speaker, has been questioned, that it should not have been and that action must be taken. However, I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends, when deciding the level of penalty, to take into account the fact that the hon. Gentleman's integrity sometimes leads him astray—on that occasion, it certainly did—and that they give him the benefit of that judgment.

11.33 pm

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Everyone in the House gets excited on occasions. If they do not get excited, they are not reflecting the worries, fears and excitement of their constituents. I well remember, when I first became a Member of the House, that Dame Irene Ward who had a great problem in her area, and who had raised the matter with the Ministers of the day time after time, without getting anywhere, walked from her place, stood in front of the Mace and, for a period of time, disrupted the House, and was named.

I had never seen that before, but I stored it in my memory until an occasion when we had been debating the Industrial Relations Act 1971. About 20 or 30 hon. Members—all members of the Tribune group, led incidentally by the present chairman of the parliamentary Labour party—stood in front of the Mace. I got up from the Front Bench and stood with them. We expected to be named, but Mr. Speaker of the day was a highly intelligent person. He looked through, round, above and below us, and he did not see us. He decided that we were not there.

The Division was called and it was then that the sitting was suspended. The then Mr. Speaker called a Division on a second occasion, as we had done it again.

Disruption has taken place on many occasions. I remember my hon. Friends and I singing "The Red Flag". I remember also the present leader of the Labour party joining in heartily. Indeed, he may have led the singing of "The Red Flag". Some of my hon. Friends threw pennies at us. They were the old-style large pennies. Had one of those pennies hit an hon. Member in the eye, it could have knocked it out. That was an act of some violence in the House. Let us get these matters into perspective.

I believe that there was a misunderstanding yesterday —*[Interruption.]* I wish that Conservative Members would listen carefully to what is being said. I said yesterday that I had not realised that personal statements made by hon. Members were agreed. I turned to the relevant passage in "Erskine May", and found that it does not provide that such statements have to be agreed: The passage reads:

"provided that the Speaker has been informed of what the Member proposes to say, and has given leave."

I understand that that provision has been interpreted over the years as meaning that Mr. Speaker has to agree the words in the statement.

I understand also that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) did not meet and speak to you, Mr. Speaker, on any occasion yesterday. Instead, the matter was handled through the Opposition Whips' Office. My hon. Friend the Member for Leith was asked to go to the Chief Whip's Room, and I understand that he stayed there for some time. He did not stay there throughout, and I do not know to where he disappeared. I know only that he disappeared after a period.

My hon. Friend was handed the statement when he came into the Chamber, and it had never been discussed between him and yourself, Mr. Speaker. If there is to be an agreed statement, surely Mr. Speaker of the day and the Member, whoever he is, should ensure that there is a properly agreed statement, if that is the way in which such statements are to be handled.

If we heard what my hon. Friend the Member for Leith said or if we read what he said yesterday, it is clear that he was trying to apologise in his own way—*[Interruption.]* I ask all hon. Members not to use a sledgehammer— *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Time is getting on.

Mr. Heffer: I am glad that the House is slightly in front of me.

That is what I want to say to the House. In my opinion, the House has to be compassionate on this issue. I have defended many hon. Members over the years on issues when sometimes, looking back, perhaps I ought not to have done. However, I believe that hon. Members can get highly excited on occasions and we should take that into consideration. That is why I am asking the House to support the amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), which I think is the best answer to the issue before us.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. With the leave of the House, may I move my amendment?

Mr. Speaker: Other hon. Members are rising to speak. It is not up to me to accept a closure on timed business such as this.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are still on the main Question. It is not possible to move the amendment at this point.

11.41 pm

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) certainly entertained and enlightened the House. However, I believe that he has taken us away from the main issue and I hope that he will not seduce us from it.

The hon. Members who came closest to dealing with the main issue were, in my estimation, the hon. Members for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen). They underlined the fact that this is a House of Commons occasion. We are not seeking vindictively to punish an individual Member who might have done things that he now, to some degree, repents. We are talking about upholding the authority of the Chair because whoever occupies the Chair, it protects all hon. Members. We are also underlining the importance of the two red lines on the floor of the Chamber that we see every time we come in here. They symbolise the fact that here we should seek to solve our differences by argument and persuasion, not by other means.

A total of 37 of my hon. Friends and I know what it is like to be in a minority this week, and it is for the protection of minorities, above all, that the rules and procedures of the House have been devised. It is important that every hon. Member should have the opportunity to express his opinions, however objectionable those opinions might be to his colleagues. However, it is not up to any hon. Member to usurp or desecrate the authority of the House or to challenge the Chair and, in so doing, to do the gravest disservice that he can possibly do to his constituency and those who sent him here to represent their interests.

I accept entirely the generous words that were uttered by my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), who, in three weeks' time will have the good fortune to pair with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown). I do not wish to repudiate what he said. I say this in no spirit of personal recrimination, but if the House does not unite behind the Chair and in support of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, it will have abdicated its authority. We need a united House behind you, Mr. Speaker, because of what is at stake.

11.44 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): In supporting the motion, may I point out that my background is the trade union movement and local government. On no occasion in the trade union movement or in my service in local government would the kind of behaviour that we are considering have been allowed. It is all right for some hon. Members to talk about the rules of the club, but those rules sometimes work in favour of Privy Councillors, who are called to speak before Back Benchers such as myself.

[Mr. Michael J. Martin]

I take exception to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) and other hon. Members who may have been removed from the House saying that they are the only ones who care about unemployment and the poor. Like other Back Benchers, I have to take my chance on being called to speak. I have not had an opportunity tonight to speak about the poll tax, which will affect people in Scotland before it affects people south of the border——

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to the order this day.*

The House divided: Ayes 463, Noes 27.

Division No. 270] **[11.48 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Alton, David
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Anderson, Donald
Arbuthnot, James
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barron, Kevin
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & Rdish)*
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blair, Tony
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyes, Roland
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coleman, Donald
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Crowther, Stan
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dewar, Donald
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Durant, Tony
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Faulds, Andrew
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gill, Christopher
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gould, Bryan
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hardy, Peter
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harris, David
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Haynes, Frank
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Doug
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Holt, Richard
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Janner, Greville
Jessel, Toby
John, Brynmor
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leadbitter, Ted
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lewis, Terry
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
McCrindle, Robert
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*

McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marek, Dr John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxton, John
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michael, Alun
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Murphy, Paul
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Richardson, Jo
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robertson, George
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stott, Roger
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Straw, Jack
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Turner, Dennis
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Vaz, Keith
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Walley, Joan
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilshire, David
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Worthington, Tony
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. David Maclean.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Clay, Bob
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cryer, Bob
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Heffer, Eric S.
Hinchliffe, David
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Loyden, Eddie
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marlow, Tony
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Nellist, Dave
Parry, Robert
Primarolo, Dawn
Sedgemore, Brian
Skinner, Dennis
Wall, Pat
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Harry Cohen and
Mr. Dennis Canavan.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

That Mr. Ron Brown be suspended from the service of the House for twenty sitting days, and be held responsible for the damage that was sustained by the Mace.

PETITIONS

Maternity Services

12.2 am

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): I beg to present a petition on behalf of more than 200 midwives and mothers from Dundee who are calling on the House—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Would hon. Members kindly leave the Chamber quietly?

Mr. McAllion: Those midwives and mothers are calling on the House to face the facts about the crisis in the country's maternity services—*[Interruption.]* caused by the Government's underfunding of the Health Service in general—*[Interruption.]* and the maternity service—*[Interruption.]*

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Words are being used by Opposition Members such as louse, coward and philistine. I ask you to ask the hon. Gentlemen to withdraw those unparliamentary terms.

Mr. Speaker: If hon. Members below the Gangway and elsewhere are not interested in the petition, will they kindly leave the Chamber while we get on with the business of the House?

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Go, go.

Mr. Douglas: The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) has done enough damage today to the reputation of the House without telling me and others how to behave.

I distinctly heard the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) who is standing beyond the Bar refer to some of us who abstained, having listened to all the debate—*[Interruption.]* Yes, we listened to all the debate—as lacking moral courage. Anyone who says that is beneath contempt. If I used words such as louse, and they are unparliamentary, I would withdraw them.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to use your powers to censure people who will not come into the Chamber from the outer precincts of the House and who use that situation—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I say to the whole House in the aftermath of the debate we have just had that I hope that behaviour in this Chamber will proceed in good order. I was listening to the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) who was raising his petition. I was not listening to what was going on beyond the Gangway. I call Mr. John McAllion.

Mr. McAllion: If the right hon Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) wishes to display moral courage, perhaps he will stay behind and lend his support to the 300 midwives and mothers in Dundee who call upon this House to face the facts about the crisis in the country's Health Service and in particular in the maternity services.

The petition further calls upon the Commons to support the Royal College of Midwives in calling upon the Government to provide the funding that will remove the risk to mothers and babies that at present exists. I heartily commend this petition to the House.

To lie upon the Table.

Rating Reform

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): I beg to present a petition against the poll tax in Scotland which was gathered at the Springburn shopping centre. There are at least 1,500 signatures, including that of my wife, Mary. I can assure the House that no one at Springburn shopping centre refused to sign the petition when asked. That shows that there is absolutely no support for the poll tax in Scotland. I have pleasure in presenting this petition on behalf of my constituents.

To lie upon the Table.

Residential Care and Nursing Homes (Scotland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

12.6 am

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): I much appreciate this opportunity to bring to the attention of the House and the Minister the importance of the subject for debate tonight. While I agree that many elderly people are living contented and satisfied lives in residential and nursing homes, we have evidence that many others are spending years in drab and boring hospital institutions that offer little prospect for privacy and dignity in advancing years.

Many elderly people become confused and upset when they are uprooted to other types of houses or hospitals as their infirmity advances. The proposal we are debating tonight is that all elderly people in care and in accommodation in Scotland should be subject to some form of registration, and that such registration should cover all providers of care for the elderly, including local authorities, health boards, owners of private homes, and voluntary organisations.

I am aware that a system of sorts operates in England and Wales, but the legislation underpinning it is merely a consolidation of various practices and legal obligations that have grown with time. That system contains numerous pitfalls that I hope we might escape in Scotland. We have a golden opportunity to learn from those mistakes, so that we can and will create a legislative framework that will take us into the 21st century, with a clear vision of our obligations to the growing numbers of elderly in our communities and our ability to meet them.

Registration should be a means of demanding that universal standards apply to all settings in which the elderly live permanently. It must include regular inspections to ensure that standards are maintained, as is outlined in paragraph 6 of the Griffiths report and in paragraph 30 of the Wagner report.

I suggest that the registration body should have to be made up of experts in health, housing and social services, perhaps also including a representative from a national organisation such as Age Concern, which does such magnificent work on behalf of the elderly. I earnestly believe that such a body should have a degree of autonomy, with experts seconded from such major organisations. A multi-disciplinary body such as this is more likely to be able to take enforcement action which a single authority might find itself reluctant to take because of the consequent responsibility for homelessness which the most extreme action may require.

Demographic trends show a significant and advancing increase in the number of people over the age of 75, and an even greater increase in the number who—thankfully—are living beyond the age of 85. The latter are more likely to be physically and/or mentally frail. They are more likely to be single or widowed, and hence to live alone. They are also more likely, as the records show, to have poor housing and a low income. They are thus more likely to need proper residential care.

The task is a large one, and it is growing extremely fast. Indeed, outwith my constituency, in Ayrshire alone, the increase in homes for the elderly is already quite stunning.

In 1980 there were just 200 places; now there are 1,400. Registration is therefore essential to ensure universal and adequate conditions.

The registration must have as its purpose the requirement to meet basic human needs. The need for food, shelter, warmth, personal space, autonomy and identity are, as I am sure most hon. Members will agree, fundamental, and are not diminished with advancing age. Indeed, the reverse is the case.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will my hon. Friend confirm that, when he and I and other Ayrshire Members met the Ayrshire and Arran health board, the officers of that board also confirmed their concern about the increase in the number of places for the elderly, and the difficulty of registration in Ayrshire; and that they support the plea that he is putting forward tonight?

Mr. McKelvey: I shall underline that shortly by reading a brief paragraph from a communication that I received from the authority.

Old people should reasonably expect the same standards of accommodation as younger or fit people in their own homes. Indeed, as their universe is often limited to their own surroundings, I feel that it is more important for them to expect and receive a higher standard of accommodation and care. It would be a mistake, however, to believe that the elderly fall neatly into set categories requiring less or more care. We are dealing with human beings, not cans of beans. These people cannot be shuttled about in the system as they grow more frail and elderly —or, indeed, become less profitable. That, I feel, should be uppermost in our minds. I consider it unnecessary and, indeed, cruel to shunt elderly people around because of lack of nursing provision. Often such nursing care may take only a short time to perform, and it is less often in any sense intensive.

If a residential home becomes overburdened with frail and elderly people at the extreme end of dependency, the level of nursing care for that home should be increased correspondingly. That raises two important issues which I am sure have already been brought to the Minister's attention: the assessment of need for nursing care, and the knotty problem of finance. Age Concern has researched all those issues thoroughly, and has come to the sensible conclusion that full health and social assessment should be undertaken before any elderly person enters any type of residential care, and should continue at regular intervals thereafter—that is most important—for each resident. In that way, the owners or authorities concerned are able to assess requirements, and detect any deterioration or indeed improvement in condition, and are able to plan resources accordingly.

Assessment takes place in some areas of residential care, particularly in local authority and health board homes and hospitals. Some private nursing homes, to their credit, have also undertaken this form of assessment. The problem is that it is piecemeal and that, when it takes place, some things, particularly social considerations, may be completely ignored or overlooked. That is why I suggest that a multi-disciplinary body, much like that previously suggested for registration, should be set up to assess all potential and permanent residents in all types of accommodation. Such a body could consist of health workers, social workers and housing experts and include an advocate to speak on the residents' behalf.

Nursing care costs money—everyone knows that—and it is likely that fees will increase as the need for nursing care increases beyond a certain point. That must be made clear to residents or their representatives on entering residential accommodation, and the means to do that should be an initial contract with the resident and any subsidising authority. Such a contract is essential to ensuring that residents are not unduly worried by rising fees that are not agreed by the subsidising authority.

This problem has already caused considerable concern to residents and their families in my constituency. A lady came to see me who was concerned about the care for her mother in a residential home. She had been gazumped. Two months before the new prices were to be announced by the DHSS, the owners of the home demanded another £10 a week—or else. They even went so far as to suggest that the £9·25 that the person received on behalf of her mother—she was on social security and got £34—should be handed over to the home to help to pay. I am glad to say that, following my intervention, the matter was conveniently dropped. The lady is now staying in the home and will receive the additional benefits.

This subject has been debated in Ayrshire in a lively way, and I shall refer to some of the organisations that have contacted me about it. The Ayrshire and Arran health board——

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Just before my hon. Friend mentions the agencies that have supported him, may I draw his attention—he may not know of it —to the early-day motion tabled in my name and those of other of my hon. Friends, which will appear for the first time on the Order Paper tomorrow? It reflects the case of Age Concern Scotland for charge in this respect, and has attracted the support of 107 hon. Members.

Mr. McKelvey: That is splendid news. I am sure that the Minister will have noticed it and will forward it to the relevant Minister for consideration.

The Ayrshire and Arran health board has said that nursing homes are identifying and meeting the need. That is correct. It also states:

> "Popular areas like Ayrshire attract many many residents from other parts of Scotland which in turn can create—and will create—demands on the National Health Service in Ayrshire for which the Board is not presently funded. It also creates real problems in relation to nurse recruitment and retention for both the public and private sectors."

There has already been an increase from 200 to 1,400 beds.

David Watts, a local practitioner on the Ayrshire and Arran local medical committee, has seen for himself the difficulties and unfair load placed on the backs of general practitioners because of the rapid growth in the number of homes in Ayrshire. He states:

> "Nursing homes require nurses and there s a finite pool of nurses in Ayrshire. At present the Health Board employs about 1,900 registered nurses and the nursing homes, who are always advertising for staff, employ 190. If uncontrolled growth is allowed to continue we will experience a nursing crisis.
>
> The second area of concern relates to the impact of private nursing homes on the workload of general practice. No account is taken of the ability of local general practitioners to cope with the extra workload and the consequence is that homes open and discover the local doctors are reluctant to accept the residents onto their lists of patients because they feel unable to cope with the increased demand."

[Mr. McKelvey]

I have received a letter from Martin Kuhn, who is a nurse in a geriatric hospital at the sharp end of the problem. None of us envies his working conditions and his job requires the utmost devotion. He has brought to my attention the fact that at its annual conference the Royal College of Nursing will debate the following motion:

"That this meeting of the Royal College of Nursing congress requests council to urge the Government to establish a national, trained inspectorate to monitor standards of nursng care in all private nursing and residential homes in the United Kingdom."

The largest nursing union in this country is concerned about the growing problem mentioned in that motion.

Those who devote all their time to the care of the elderly in the National Health Service know that the elderly and frail are being shunted down to them as they become less profitable to private hospitals. That does not lead to an atmosphere that is conducive to good working practices.

Age Concern Scotland—in its document "The Case for Change"—says that the distinction between residential care homes and nursing homes providing long-term care should be abandoned as they are no longer useful or appropriate to today's standards. They have written to the Minister along those lines and are still awaiting a reply. I am indebted to Mary Marshall of Age Concern Scotland for her work, which she brings to the attention of hon. Members.

I have received many letters from Elizabeth Reid of Kilmarnock, who works on behalf of carers. I ask the Minister to reflect on the fact that last year the Public Accounts Committee said that the Government spent £450 million on private residential care. That is a large sum of money and much profit has been made by those who run private residential homes. Elizabeth Reid says that many people would prefer to keep their elderly relatives at home. She thinks—I am sure that this will happen—that all carers should write to their Members of Parliament asking the Government to change the law so that invalid care allowance is made a free benefit and so that carers are not pressed further into the poverty trap. If half that £450 million were to be transferred to carers, untouched by benefit subtractions, the Government might improve the fate of our elderly and frail people who, despite being happy in residential homes, would prefer to stay at home if they were not a burden to the rest of the family.

I thank everybody who has written to me about this subject. The matters raised by Age Concern Scotland and the Griffiths report provide us with the criteria to meet the needs of the growing number of elderly people in Scotland. My earnest hope is that their proposals can be transformed into legislation sooner rather than later. I feel that we owe our elderly people the right to live a proper and dignified life in their latter years.

12.24 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudon (Mr. McKelvey) on his success in the ballot and his concern in raising this important subject. I join him in paying tribute to the work of Age Concern. Perhaps I could reassure him that I did reply to Miss Marshall on 12 February in response to the booklet and advised her that it would not be possible for us to offer views on the recommendations until we had had a chance to consider the recommendations arising from the review by Lady Wagner into the future of residential care and Sir Roy Griffiths's report on care in the community.

Scottish local authorities currently provide around 60 per cent. of all residential places for elderly persons and other adult groups, comprising some 11,000 places, while the voluntary sector provides around 6,000 places and the private sector approximately 2,400. This is a rather different picture from that which exists in England and Wales where places are divided fairly evenly between the independent and statutory sectors and over two thirds of the independent places are provided by the private sector. Because of the larger private sector, the total number of homes, and places in homes, is considerably greater in England and Wales in relative terms.

Long-stay nursing homes are provided mainly by the private sector. In 1979 there were 77 registered nursing homes containing 2,612 beds. By 1987 the number of homes had increased to 164 with 5,063 beds. Of those, about 700 beds were in establishments offering acute hospital facilities. The major growth however is in the long-stay sector. While information setting out the position at March 1988 is not yet to hand, signs are that the increase has continued.

The number of homes and the total number of places available in residential homes has risen relatively slowly in the past 10 years or so. But the fact is that we have in Scotland a higher proportion of elderly persons in long-term hospital care than in England and Wales and considerable unmet demands for residential care as witnessed by the weight of pending applications.

I am in no doubt that a considerably enlarged residential care sector is desirable in Scotland, not necessarily in the traditional mould of residential homes, though accommodation of this kind is recognised as having a continuing and important role in the care of the elderly. One aspect of this need is the high proportion of elderly, mentally handicapped and mentally ill persons, who are inappropriately placed in long-stay hospital accommodation.

The current Scottish position in this regard suggests not merely ineffective use of resources on relatively expensive hospital care but a failure to meet the likely needs and preferences of the persons concerned in many cases. There are, for example, currently twice as many occupied beds in geriatric hospitals in Scotland as in England, and the figures for patients in mental illness and the psychiatric hospitals are not very different. Even with the new emphasis on domiciliary care, there is a real risk of a greater imbalance between hospital and community as the size of the very elderly population continues to rise.

Local authorities cannot realistically plead for more resources when they are not making the best use of the opportunities that are available, at very little cost to themselves, through the private sector. There is evidence now that some at least are beginning to grasp the opportunities available. I see no inherent contradiction between the encouragement of the private sector and proper control of standards. There are indeed plenty of examples of better, more responsive, services resulting in this way for elderly persons and others in need of care in a residential setting.

In this sphere as in so many others, competition between the public and the private sectors can lead to

greater choice for the individual consumer and enable the local authority to spread its own resources for care in the community more widely.

I would not wish to dwell solely on the potential contribution of the private sector. Indeed, I pay tribute to the voluntary sector which has served Scotland so well for many years and remains, meanwhile at least, the principal source of independently provided accommodation.

It is our view that a well-regulated independent sector has an important and significant role to play in the provision of residential care. Such provision is an important part of the Government's strategy of care in the community for the more vulnerable members of society, including the physically and mentally disabled and particularly the frail elderly whose numbers are growing steadily and will continue to grow.

Under the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 and the Nursing Homes Registration (Scotland) Act 1938, responsibility for the control and monitoring of independent residential care and nursing homes rests with the local authority and health board respectively. Registration is not concerned purely with physical standards. It is also about residents experiencing a good quality of life and enabling them to maintain as much personal independence and dignity as possible. Sound local authority practice and procedures relating to the registration and inspection of establishments are crucial if acceptable standards of care are to be maintained.

The 1968 Act requires that residential establishments whose sole or main object is the provision of social work care require to be registered with the local authority. These arrangements apply to all client groups, including children. Authorities can refuse or cancel registration if they consider the person operating the establishment or person employed as a manager is not a "fit person", if the building, its fitments or staffing are not fit for the purposes intended, or if the conduct of the establishment is not deemed to be, or likely to be, such as to provide the services required. Persons who are aggrieved by refusal or cancellation of registration may appeal to an independent tribunal. In the 20 years since these provisions have been in force we have had only one such appeal in Scotland, and that did not relate to standards of care.

Local authorities have a duty under the 1968 Act to inspect establishments which they have registered and have appropriate powers of entry.

Mr. McKelvey: I ask the Minister to consider two points. First, I am not surprised that there are not a great number of complaints about the system, because those who use it are often bullied and are too frightened to complain. If they did, they would be put out on the streets.

Secondly, the Minister has not responded to my suggestion that there ought to be a multi-disciplinary body. Both Griffiths and Wagner have concluded that that ought to be the means whereby residential homes are monitored.

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman has evidence of the kind of practice that he has just described, I should like to see it. We are still considering the Griffiths report recommendations. We shall also consider very carefully the arguments that the hon. Gentleman has put to us. The evidence that is available to the Scottish Office shows that the standards of care are good, in the main, and that the local authorities have powers that they can use, but it seems that it has been unnecessary to use them to maintain standards of care.

Local authorities have a duty under the 1968 Act to inspect establishments that they have registered, and they have powers of entry.

Mr. McKelvey: One of the problems that local authorities face is that if they close an institution all that they do is to put the inhabitants out into the street and the community has to take care of them. Therefore, they are very reluctant to use such an extreme measure.

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman has evidence of homes that local authorities wish to close because of inadequate standards but are not doing so, I should like to see it. He is saying that they are not using their powers because they would be unable to provide alternative accommodation. I said earlier that we wish to encourage the wider provision of accommodation in the private sector to meet these demands.

The provisions that I have described were strengthened during the last Parliament by a measure introduced on the Government's behalf by my former hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan which became the Registered Establishments (Scotland) Act 1987. It is relevant to the debate that I remind the House of the provisions of that Act. It enables local authorities to charge fees for the registration and subsequent monitoring and inspection of establishments, as has been done in England and Wales since 1985.

The Act extends authorities' powers to impose any reasonable conditions of registration, subject to the opportunity given to the home owner to appeal to the tribunal. That enhances authorities' control over establishments registrable with them to a greater degree than is available in the south. Here we meet the point which the hon. Gentleman made about elderly people having to move from one home to another. The Act also introduces the concept of joint registration of establishments, providing both residential and nursing care in contrast to the existing legislation which neither explicitly permits nor forbids this practice.

The measure as a whole was welcomed by the statutory, voluntary and private sectors alike. We are on the point of issuing a consultation paper outlining our proposals on the level of fees which local authorities will be allowed to charge for registrations.

The hon. Gentleman is legitimately concerned about the arrangements for regulating standards in both residential care homes and nursing homes. The first essential, I believe, is that homes of both kinds suitable in location, design, construction, furnishing and equipment should be operated by persons who are suitable for the task, have proper training and experience and have sufficient, carefully chosen and suitably trained staff at their command.

As I have said, responsibility for the registration and inspection of voluntary and private homes rests with local authorities. Authorities are accountable for the actions they take in the exercise of these responsibilities, and may in the last resort have to defend their decision to refuse or withdraw registration before an appeal tribunal. In that situation they must be free to exercise their discretion, and detailed prescription by the Secretary of State regarding the exercise of their functions could not be justified.

[Mr. Forsyth]

In exercising the discretion available to them, local authorities will need to have particular regard to the physical and care standards in their own homes. It would clearly be unacceptable to have different standards in the independent and statutory sectors. The duty of care that they owe to their own residents is, if anything, greater than that they can discharge in regard to those in the care of others.

I trust that the hon. Member is satisfied with the assurance I have given regarding the regulation of standards in private and voluntary residential care in nursing homes in Scotland, and the measures currently taken to secure the best interests of residents in care. If the hon. Member——

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock on Wednesday evening, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-three minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 21 April 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT BILL *(By Order)*
Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [10 December], That the Bill be now considered.
Debate further adjourned till Thursday 28 April.

TEIGNMOUTH QUAY COMPANY BILL *(By Order)*

YORK CITY COUNCIL BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

ASSOCIATED BRITISH PORTS (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

CARDIFF BAY BARRAGE BILL *(By Order)*

CITY OF LONDON (SPITALFIELDS MARKET) BILL *(By Order)*

FALMOUTH CONTAINER TERMINAL BILL *(By Order)*

NORTH KILLINGHOLME CARGO TERMINAL BILL *(By Order)*

ST. GEORGE'S HILL, WEYBRIDGE, ESTATE BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 28 April.

SOUTHERN WATER AUTHORITY BILL *(By Order)*
Read a Second time, and committed.

BRITISH RAILWAYS (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*
Order read for resuming debate on Question [15 March], That the Bill be now read a Second time.
Debate to be resumed upon Wednesday 27 April at Seven o'clock.

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE TOWN MOOR BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for Second reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 28 April.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Litter

1. **Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were convicted of dropping litter in the past year.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hogg): In 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, 1,400 people were found guilty of offences under the Litter Act 1983.

Mr. McNair-Wilson: Does my hon. Friend not think that that number makes a mockery of the Litter Act, in view of the appalling amount of litter that defaces our towns and cities? Bearing in mind that there are at least 90,000 constables in the police force, many of whom are bobbies on the beat, is it too much to expect each policeman to obtain one prosecution a year against a litter lout?

Mr. Hogg: I am sympathetic to the point that my hon. Friend has made. Inevitably, the deployment of police officers is an operational matter for chief constables. I do not think that the criminal law can ever be the primary instrument for resolving this problem.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the Minister agree that it would be most unlikely for a prosecution to ensue if the piece of litter found was a copy of the speech by the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit)? Does he also agree that that speech is certainly part of the political litter of this country——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is miles wide of this question.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my hon. Friend accept that many people in this country believe that the United Kingdom is now the litter gutter of the world? The situation is disgusting and deplorable. Will he seek methods of reducing the litter problem of this country, if necessary by utilising the services and co-operation of those places that are sometimes partially responsible for it? I refer to food shops, pubs and other places from which food and drink are available. It is a disgrace. Will my hon. Friend attend to it?

Mr. Hogg: I agree that there is far too much litter around and that it is a disgrace. That is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has given her personal support to the Keep Britain Tidy campaign.

Essentially, the solution to the problem lies in persuading people of their personal and social obligations not to create litter.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the Minister aware that last month litter was deliberately strewn around St. James's park, only to be collected by a lady of pensionable years and stuffed into a black plastic bag carried by a strange old cove covered in fag ash and muttering obscenities under his breath? Can he cast any light on this bizarre incident, and have the two litter louts concerned been prosecuted?

Mr. Hogg: My recollection is that the litter was picked up with considerable elegance.

Prisoners (Non-violent Crimes)

2. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are currently serving custodial sentences for crimes not involving violence.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hurd): About 22,000.

Mr. Yeo: Does my right hon. Friend agree that his answer shows that we are cluttering up our prisons with far too many people for whom non-custodial sentences would be appropriate? Does that not make it more difficult to ensure that the public are protected from those dangerous and violent criminals for whom sentences all too often seem to be far too short? Therefore, will he try to make a further attempt to introduce some common sense into sentencing policy?

Mr. Hurd: Yes, Sir. Of the 50,000 people in prison at the moment, about 10,000 are awaiting trial, 22,000—on whom I have just reported to my hon. Friend—have committed non-violent offences, and about 18,000 have committed violent offences. I think we all agree that those in prison for violent offences not only should be there but in some cases should be there for longer than they are. We should like to reduce the numbers on remand. As regards the 22,000 in prison for non-violent offences, we want to see a wider choice for the courts. It is for the courts to decide, but for such offenders we want a wider choice of punishment outside prison in cases where the courts think that they are suitable.

Mr. Vaz: Is the Home Secretary aware that on 10 April 1988 the board of visitors of Welford road prison, Leicester, published a report that was highly critical of the Home Office, and that the chairman of the board, Mr. Dennis Rice, said that Welford road prison remains afloat with a combination of miracle and luck? Is he also aware that the prison was built for 200 inmates but that it now houses, on average, 411 inmates per day? What steps does the Home Secretary propose to take to ease the crisis in the prison service in Leicester, rather than the cosmetic steps that he announced to the House on 30 March this year?

Mr. Hurd: Because of our policy of open government, the reports of boards of visitors at particular prisons, which had not been published before, are now made available to the public. I am perfectly well aware that boards of visitors at many of our overcrowded local prisons are critical of the conditions that they find. They add strength to my elbow in pressing for and achieving the acceleration of the prison building programme which I announced just before Easter, which, undoubtedly, together with the other measures that are in hand, will help to relieve the pressure of which the hon. Gentleman complains.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Is my right hon. Friend aware that his figures show that almost nine out of 10 14-year-olds serving detention centre orders have not committed crimes of violence? Does that not further underline the absurdity of maintaining penal custody as an option for children of that age?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend, whose interest in this matter I know, will welcome the fact that the number of juveniles sentenced to detention or youth custody dropped sharply from 7,700 in 1981 to 4,400 in 1986. The use of that power by the courts has been dropping, and that is quite right. Equally, there are occasions when young people, even boys of 14, commit crimes of such brutal violence, or other serious crimes, that the courts, whose decision it is, decide to send them to prison. There is an eloquent letter by my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) in *The Times* on that subject today.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: If the Minister is serious about wanting to keep more non-violent offenders out of prison, why is there so much emphasis, in all the rhetoric coming from himself and his Government colleagues, on the punishment of offenders? When will the Government realise that the only way to deal with overcrowding in our prisons and the rates of reoffending is to break the cycle of crime by keeping people out of prison unless they are a real danger to society?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Lady's question illustrates the basic weakness in the Labour party's approach to the matter. There is a strong human instinct, which Labour Members had better recognise, that when people have offended by doing harm or damage, or by effecting brutality on other people, they should be "punished". That is the word that they use. *[Interruption.]* That is what the hon. Lady is complaining about, unless there was a slip of the tongue. I am saying that for non-violent offenders I want to create for the courts a range of punishments, not all of which will involve imprisonment.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend will know that those who commence their sentences at Rollestone temporary prison camp on Salisbury plain are mostly category C prisoners. Will he undertake to give special attention to monitoring the scheme, which will involve the use of a Home Office prison governor, but with custody being in the hands of the military—all three forces—to ensure that that management system works effectively?

Mr. Hurd: I think that it will, and I am grateful for my hon. Friend's interest. As he knows, the Rollestone camp will reopen fairly soon until late autumn. I am confident that the mixture of a prison governor responsible to me, and, this time, with some help from the Army, will be as fruitful as it was in 1981.

Gaming Machines

3. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is now able to announce whether he proposes to seek to amend the law concerning the accessibility of gaming machines to children and young persons; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Home Office, (Mr. Tim Renton): Not yet. I refer the hon. Member to the statement which my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, made during discussion of a proposed amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill in Committee on 24 March. We are examining the various reports and other work that we commissioned into the subject last year and all the other material that we have been sent by those interested. We shall make our views known as soon as we are ready to do so, which we hope will be before the summer recess.

Mr. Taylor: I am sure that the Minister is as worried as I am about the increasing addiction and the devastation that that causes to parents, particularly in tourist areas such as mine, which have many such units and many applications coming in for more. I understand that the Minister has had the reports for some considerable time. Will he say how long they have been in his possession? At

present, operators have a voluntary code banning those under 18. Does the Minister agree that it would be sensible to consider amending that code and imposing a statutory ban, at least up to the age of 18, if not up to the age of 21?

Mr. Renton: I appreciate the anxiety of hon. Members who, like the hon. Gentleman, represent tourist areas. However, he will know that opinion is divided on whether it is right to introduce further regulations on fruit machines in amusement arcades. We have not had the reports for very long. We are now studying them very closely, and, as I said, we shall inform the House of our conclusions, we hope, before the summer recess.

Sir Peter Emery: Will my hon. Friend consider the difference between amusement arcades run in holiday camps or other controlled areas, where children often have their families with them, and arcades in towns or on sea fronts, to which children can go without their parents' permission or knowledge? It would be very much appreciated if action could be taken, even before the end of the summer recess, as a number of town councils are worried about the growth in the number of children going into the arcades and then finding themselves in the courts.

Mr. Renton: My hon. Friend puts his finger on one of the points being studied. We need to make a distinction between seaside towns, for example—where only a few fruit machines are available and to which families should be allowed, or, indeed, encouraged to go with all their children—we do not want to be killjoys—and those areas that are devoted to fruit machines, where the possibility of addiction is even greater.

In answer to my hon. Friend's last point, local authorities have considerable powers at present. The Home Office proposes to produce model byelaws for them. I do not think that we shall be able to produce our conclusions before the summer recess.

Miss Lestor: Is the Minister aware that many local authorities, mine included, are sick and tired of objecting to developments such as amusements arcades and having their objections overridden by the Department of the Environment? May I remind him that it is nearly three months since I sent to his Department a report produced by Parents of Young Gamblers? His Department told me that it would see me and a representative of that organisation, before it reached its conclusions, to discuss parents' real fears. When is that meeting likely to take place?

Mr. Renton: I understand that the hon. Lady is to have a meeting with my hon. Friend the Minister of State. I shall certainly check with him as to when it will be. I know that the report that the hon. Lady sent in has been carefully studied.

In answer to the hon. Lady's first point, the planning issues are separate, as I am sure she knows. They deal with environmental issues. The Home Office considers licensing issues, and it is about those that we shall report to the House.

Crime Statistics

4. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the latest trends in crime in Greater London.

Mr. Hurd: I welcome the fall in recorded crime in the Metropolitan police district in 1987, when 4 per cent. fewer notifiable offences were recorded than in 1986.

Mr. Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that this very welcome decline is due to the fact that we have more bobbies on the beat and that neighbourhood watch is working in London? Does he also agree that we should commend the efforts of the Metropolitan police and congratulate them, not snipe at them as some hon. Members do?

Mr. Hurd: I agree with all my hon. Friend's points. It is notable that in the last year the number of hours spent on street duty by uniformed police officers was almost 10 per cent. up on the year before. That is the equivalent of 300 more police officers on the street each day.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the Home Secretary agree that the position would be even better and further improved if hundreds of Metropolitan police officers did not have to spend their time as temporary gaolers? When will that situation end?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman, who represents a constituency outside London, will welcome the reductions in crime also in Greater Manchester, Merseyside and the west midlands. The hon. Gentleman is right when he talks about using police officers as temporary gaolers. It is a lousy use of police officers to control people who ought to be in prison. That was because of an overflow, which, unfortunately, was necessary for the reasons that I set out in my statement on 30 March. The numbers are now declining from about 1,500 a each night to about 1,100 each night. The numbers are still far too high, but, as the measures that I announced on 30 March come into effect, they will further decline.

Mr. Budgen: Will my right hon. Friend reconsider the problems of persistent prostitution in Greater London and now recognise that it was a mistake to take away from the courts the right to gaol women convicted of persistent prostitution? Is he aware that in Wolverhampton it is plain that fining these women is no deterrent at all? However reluctantly, he will have to recognise that it may be necessary to imprison some of them.

Mr. Hurd: I shall be very reluctant to go down the road suggested by my hon. Friend. If he would send me the facts and figures as far as they are available for Wolverhampton, I shall look into them.

Mr. Hattersley: Is the Home Secretary aware of the great disquiet in London caused by the policy that the Metropolitan police describe as crime screening, which results in many crimes not even being investigated? As the police authority for London, can he say whether he approves of that scheme and how it will affect the clear-up rate in London? Can he also say how many London burglaries and thefts, now running at more than 500,000 a year, will not be investigated in future because of the screening?

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the London and national clear-up rates have improved, and the rate of burglaries in London and elsewhere has declined.

The answer to his specific question is yes. Crime screening is a method of focusing the detecting resources

of the police and enabling them to target those crimes that offer the best prospects for successful detection. I support the Commissioner in his operation of that scheme.

Mr. Marlow: As a means of reducing the level of crime still further, will my right hon. Friend consider the reactivation of a modern system of stocks as being a particularly appropriate punishment for dealing with vandalism, graffiti artists and some forms of football hooliganism? Will he confirm that this punishment is still on the statute book and that, it is just a question of the courts taking advantage of it.

Mr. Hurd: In answer to a previous question I expounded the idea of improving ways of punishing people in the community outside prison. I am not quite sure that we in the Home Office have got quite as far as reinventing stocks.

Official Secrets Act

5. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now announce the date of his White Paper on the reform of section 2 of the Official Secrets Act.

Mr. Hurd: I hope to lay a White Paper before Parliament in June, but I cannot yet give a more precise commitment.

Mr. Rooker: When the Home Secretary lays the White Paper before the House, will he tell us whether the new official secrets policy will lead to the reopening of the Wormhoudt massacre file, and therefore, it is hoped bringing to account the former Nazi officer, Wilhelm Mohnke of Hamburg, whose address I have supplied to him, having obtained it from the publication *World War II Investigator*?

Does the Home Secretary accept that the massacre of over 80 unarmed members of the Royal Warwickshire regiment, which happened in 1940, happened as though it was yesterday for the survivors, like my constituent 81-year-old Reg West? Mr. West and the other survivors are still seeking justice for themselves and for their fallen comrades. We owe it to them.

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman was kind enough to give me notice that he was going to raise that point, and I have been in touch with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, whose records these are. My right hon. Friend has asked me to make it clear that the relevant material, which is in the custody of his Department, is being rigorously re-examined to see whether there is any information which could provide a basis for the kind of action for which the hon. Gentleman is pressing.

Mr. Allason: Will my right hon. Friend say whether, with his Cabinet colleagues, he has concluded that judicial review is a good idea in his intended reform of the Official Secrets Act, or whether he is still committed to the 1979 idea of a ministerial certificate that something is secret?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend will have to await the White Paper for elucidation of that and other points, but I hope that he will not have long to wait.

Mr. Dalyell: Does the Ministry of Defence still think that it has all the relevant records?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman must address that matter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Mr. Bellingham: When my right hon. Friend reviews the Official Secrets Act, he must obviously investigate the case of the SS general in detail, because it involves the murder of British troops. However, does he agree that we must not start a witch hunt against Germans living in this country? In my constituency, a number of former German prisoners of war have already been the subject of abuse. Does he agree that it is important that we do not start that kind of witch hunt?

Mr. Hurd: As I understand it, in the case about which the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Bar (Mr. Rooker) is concerned, there is no jurisdiction in this country. It would be for my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, in the light of the examination about which I have already told the hon. Gentleman, to consider whether any representations should be made to the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany. That is where the matter lies.

AIDS

6. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether any guidance has been given to police forces on the subject of AIDS in relation to the arrest of suspects.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Guidance issued by the Association of Chief Police Officers in 1985 included advice on the precautions to be taken against the risks of infection from contaminated blood and sharp objects, such as syringes.

Mr. Illsley: Does the Minister believe that those guidelines should be reinforced or strengthened, particularly in view of an arrest which took place in my constituency recently, which has resulted in an action for damages by a police officer, somewhat mischievously, against an arrested suspect?

Mr. Hogg: This is clearly a serious matter and the Home Office, in conjunction with the DHSS, is drafting further guidance. That further guidance is the subject of discussions with the ACPO and other staff associations.

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson: What compensation will be available to a police constable who might be attacked by a sufferer from AIDS and might himself therefore contract the disease?

Mr. Hogg: I am glad to say that, so far as I am aware, no officer has contracted AIDS as a result of his duty, but if an officer did contract AIDS as a result of his duty, I understand that he would be covered by the normal sickness provisions within the force.

Violent Crime (Sentences)

7. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what percentage the average sentence for crimes of violence increased between 1980 and 1987.

Mr. Hurd: Between 1980 and 1986 Crown court sentences increased by 12 per cent. for offences of violence committed by men over 21. Within that, sentences for robbery increased by 21 per cent. and for rape by 27 per cent. The Criminal Justice Bill, as my hon. Friend knows, will give the Attorney-General power to refer over-lenient sentences for serious offences to the Court of Appeal, which will be able, for the first time, to increase the sentence.

Mr. Coombs: I welcome those figures and the provisions in the Criminal Justice Bill to allow the prosecution the right of appeal over over-lenient, sentences. However, earlier this year in my constituency, totally unprovoked, two young men so badly beat up a cyclist that he suffered a broken rib and lost the use of a kidney. Is there not a strong case, given the fact that these people were fined only £200, for mandatory prison sentences for those who commit acts of violence that mean that people's health is permanently impaired?

Mr. Hurd: If the House had to start calculating minimum sentences, of imprisonment or otherwise, for particular offences, we would have to take into account the greatest conceivable number of mitigating circumstances, such as where the provocation had been greatest. If we once had to go down that road, we would establish minima that were so low that our constituents would wonder what was going on. It must be sensible to establish a maximum, and to increase the maximum where that seems necessary, and then, within that, to let the court get on with assessing, as best it can, the right sentence for the particular case, but with the proviso, which is important, as my hon. Friend has recognised, in the Criminal Justice Bill that the Attorney-General should be able to refer to the Court of Appeal cases involving violence where he thinks that the decision of the court has been over-lenient.

Mr. Duffy: Is the Home Secretary aware that south Yorkshire's crime rate continues to hit new peaks, not only in violence, but in sex attacks, burglaries and robberies? The chief constable, in his latest report to his county authority, claimed an improvement in an already creditable detection rate, but the general assessment is of a need for more equipment and manpower, which his 1987 approvals did not even begin to match.

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Member's question is a symptom of the extraordinary turnround in the attitude of some, although not all, Labour Members to the expansion of the police forces. We have been consistent in favouring and putting into practice a steady expansion of the police forces. For the current year I have an allocation agreed under the expansion programme for 500 extra police officers. Before long we shall announce that allocation for this year, and also before long we shall have to consider the further development of the right kind of manpower levels for the police forces of England and Wales after the present expansion programme is ended.

Mr. Lawrence: Would there not be many fewer crimes of violence if violent men had to fear the penalty of death?

Mr. Hurd: That is a matter to which my hon. and learned Friend will be able to return when we deal with the new clause which I expect to be tabled for the Report stage on the Criminal Justice Bill.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Are not the majority of over-lenient sentences for crimes of violence passed by lay magistrates? Should this not be met by much better training in sentencing policy and practice for lay magistrates?

Mr. Hurd: I am not sure that I agree with that. We are fortunate not only in the dedication of our lay magistrates but in their increasing skill and professionalism.

Fraud Investigations

8. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to assist other parts of the country to follow the joint initiative of the Avon and Somerset constabulary and the West of England Society of Chartered Accountants, under which members of the society provide their expertise free to the police to assist in fraud investigations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We warmly welcome initiatives such as this, where the police and the community act together against crime. I am sure that the help given by accountants in the fight against serious fraud in Avon and Somerset will be invaluable. I understand that a similar scheme also exists in the Metropolitan police and that co-operation in other force areas is under discussion. This is highly commendable.

Mr. Stern: Does my hon. Friend agree that, however valuable the training given to fraud squad officers in the investigation in particular financial fraud, it will never match the professional experience gained by solicitors, accountants and so on who are dealing with financial records every day? Will he therefore encourage the spread of the scheme and possibly involve the professions in training for this aspect of police officers' work?

Mr. Hogg: I would be pleased to see a spread of this kind of scheme in appropriate circumstances. It is important not to under-estimate the high skills acquired by police officers specialising in this work.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Have not members of the Society of Chartered Accountants, on a number of occasions, pointed to the difficulties that arise when attempts are made to bring prosecutions for fraud against major defence contractors? As the law department of the City of London polytechnic has offered to carry out research into this sector, drawing on the experience of many of our European partners, will the Minister take up that offer, and even help with the funding of that research exercise, because the taxpayer would benefit immeasurably?

Mr. Hogg: Before replying in detail to a question of that kind I should like to have clearer notice of the offer in question.

Mr. Hind: Will my hon. Friend also consider whether the kind of expertise that chartered acoountants can provide could usefully be made available to the Crown Prosecution Service? Often, investigations need an overall view to be taken before the case is sent to court. Such involvement could improve the number of prosecutions that result in findings of guilt in the Crown court.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend makes a very serious and useful suggestion. It was considerations of that kind that caused the Government to bring forward the concept of the serious fraud office, which employ accountants.

Crime and Young People

9. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of any correlation between the recently published statistics on crime levels and reduction in the percentage of young people in the population.

Mr. Hurd: Evidence suggests that population changes make a relatively small contribution to changes in recorded crime and known offending. The peak age for offending is 15 and our crime prevention initiatives are in

a large part directed at juvenile offending. I shall, for example, expect to see some of the schemes under the safer cities programme specifically for young people.

Mr. Flynn: I am grateful for that reply. There have been encouraging changes in the crime figures, which will be welcome in all quarters of the House, but in those categories that predominantly involve young people there have been some severe increases. There has been a 9 per cent. increase in robbery, a 12 per cent. increase in sexual offences, and a 13 per cent. increase in crimes of violence against the person.

As there will be a decrease of one quarter in the number of 16 to 19-year-olds in the population in five years, and by omitting demographic changes, the statistics are as meaningless as unemployment figures that are not seasonally related. The value of future crime figures will be obscured unless they are related to demographic changes. Will the Minister give an assurance that future published crime statistics will relate as closely as possible to demographic changes?

Mr. Hurd: It is typical of the Opposition to question the figures. When crime increases, it is said to be all the fault of the Government. When there are signs of a better trend, it is said that they are all to do with demography—*[Interruption.]* That is the point that the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) was seeking to make and it is a completely bogus one—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hurd: If the hon. Gentleman will study the research, he will notice that what I have said is true. The impact of demography, either when the figures are up or when they are down, is very slight.

Mr. Ashby: In view of the heavier sentences that my right hon. Friend said had been passed in recent years, and in view of the increase in the number of violent crimes, has he come to any conclusion about the deterrent effect of giving heavier sentences for crimes of violence? Does not the situation also reflect upon his prison programme, in view of the overcrowding that exists? Is there any deterrent effect in heavier sentencing?

Mr. Hurd: Yes, I believe that there certainly is a deterrent effect in giving heavier sentences for violent crimes. That is part of the answer, just as the increase in the number of police is part of the answer. However, my hon. Friend's question, like the original question asked by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), goes further back, to matters that influence the lapse of juveniles into crime. They lead us on to other matters that we ought constantly to discuss, such as the role of teachers, the media and parents.

Prison Officers

10. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the appointment of women prison officers to high security male prisons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No representations have been received other than from my hon. Friend. Since the beginning of this year a total of about 77 women prison officers have been posted into local and dispersal prisons and new male establishments. This innovation has proved highly successful.

Mr. Field: I welcome the appointment of female warders to high security prisons, so that they can search the female visitors, but does my hon. Friend understand that, although these warders cannot carry out the duties of male warders in high security prisons, they count against the manpower approved strength of those prisons? Does he agree that the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 is about as relevant to the need to keep international terrorists secured under lock and key as my Aunt Fanny?

Mr. Hogg: I regret that I am not acquainted with my hon. Friend's relatives, so I cannot comment on the last part of his question.

Female prison officers can perform most roles as effectively as male officers, including that of physical restraint. Moreover, their presence can frequently serve to defuse tension. It is perfectly true, however, that the deployment of female prison officers is a new policy, and because of that and the anxiety expressed by my hon. Friend I intend to review the matter in 12 months' time.

11. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to bring the number of prison officers up to establishment in maximum security prisons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: Further staff will continue to be allocated to dispersal prisons as they become available from training courses in the light of operational need.

Sir John Farr: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware, however, that there is a school of thought that holds that if Gartree prison had not been 31 prison officers under establishment at the time of the helicopter escape last January those two prisoners would not have escaped? Bearing in mind the intense responsibility of maximum security gaols, will my right hon. Friend pay particular attention to ensuring that their staffing levels are up to scratch?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend's concern is understandable. I am aware that there is such a school of thought. My hon. Friend will know, however, that it is not borne out by the report that I received on that escape from the deputy director general of the prison service. Nevertheless, by 1 April the difference at Gartree to which my hon. Friend refers had been reduced to 14, and I am glad to be able to tell him that a further nine staff are to be allocated to the prison by the end of May.

Mr. Corbett: Can the Home Secretary confirm that newly built wings in top security prisons are this day standing empty because of the lack of an adequate number of prison officers? How can prison officers combat the violence, petty crime and drug abuse on which the chief inspector of prisons comments in his latest report when officer levels in too many prisons are still well below the establishment levels agreed in the Fresh Start proposals?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman should know two things. First, the expansion of the prison service has proceeded faster than the expansion of the prison population. Secondly, whereas this year we need about 600 new prison officers to deal with wastage, we are recruiting 1,960—1,360 more than are required for wastage.

Passports

12. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current average delay in processing application for British passports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The time taken to deal with straightforward non-urgent passport applications at the five largest passport offices ranges between 13 working days at Liverpool and 54 working days at London. Urgent applications are given priority at all offices, and strenuous efforts are being made to meet every applicant's travel needs.

I announced on 31 March a number of special measures to reduce the delays, in advance of computerisation of the passport-issuing system, which should help to avoid similar problems arising in the future.

Dr. Clark: Does my hon. Friend accept that the majority of my constituents seem to be waiting for two months, which is causing some considerable inconvenience? As the delay seems to be a constant two months, and is not getting better or worse, could he not draft in some temporary staff to reduce the backlog and reduce the delay to about three to four weeks? Finally, will my hon. Friend please thank the staff in his private office for the help and courtesy that they have given me on every occasion when I have contacted them?

Mr. Renton: I thank my hon. Friend very much for his kind comments, which I shall pass forward. Because of the great increase in the demand for new passports, we took the decision two years ago to computerise—a process which starts with the Glasgow office in July. Since the beginning of this year we have recruited over 200 more staff, permanent and casual, to the passport offices—another 34 alone on a casual basis in the London office last week.

Mr. Randall: Is the Minister aware that, from his annual report, this increase in demand for passports could have been predicted as far back as 1985? Why has the Minister not taken appropriate action before now to prevent this administrative shambles? He has had plenty of time to deal with the problem. Is he aware that, because of the chaos at Lunar house and now at Petty France, the stench of administrative incompetence is emanating strongly from the departments for which he is administratively responsible?

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman's comment is a very unfair slander on the work of the trade union staff side at Clive house and Lunar house. Because of the great increase in demand, we took the decision about two years ago to computerise. The computer programme starts in Glasgow in July and, we hope, will be completed by the end of 1989. Many of the delays which we are experiencing, and which I very much regret, will then be overcome. We are looking at the possibility of giving the passport offices executive agency status. That, too, should improve the management structure and make the responsibilities clearer.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Gwilym Jones:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 21 April.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Jones: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the considerable rise in the number of operations to transplant organs, especially kidneys? May I suggest that we need to move to a form of required request legislation as the only way of dramatically increasing the availability of organs for transplant, thus countering increasing waiting lists?

The Prime Minister: I know of my hon. Friend's interest in this matter. We are committed to trying to increase the numbers of operations with transplant organs. The form of required request by doctors to relatives, for which my hon. Friend asks, was referred to a committee of the royal medical colleges, which recently considered it. The committee did not recommend legislating for it. My hon. Friend can understand the emotional problems caused in asking relatives for permission. We are pursuing a number of the recommendations for alternative approaches.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Does the Prime Minister think it morally right for Scottish and Newcastle Breweries to take over a profitable brewery in my constituency, in a development area in west Cumberland, and throw more than 40 people out of work? Does the right hon. Lady think it right that the free market gives companies the right to treat my constituents in that way? Why, when I went to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry prior to the takeover, did he refuse to intervene when I warned him that these jobs would be lost in my profitable brewery?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is aware that a takeover either qualifies for reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, and he knows the procedure well, or it does not. It seems that in this case it did not qualify. The hon. Gentleman is aware also that there must be rationalisation and redundancies from time to time to keep undertakings profitable and competitive into the future. The hon. Gentleman and I would hope that, whatever happens, people are treated well when that occurs.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: Does my right hon. Friend recall the reign of Queen Anne—*[Interruption.]*—when there was a national lottery of which the then Archbishop of Canterbury was a patron? In the event of a hospitals lottery, will an invitation be extended to Dr. Runcie?

The Prime Minister: To answer the first part of my hon. Friend's question, I do not recall those days. With regard to the National Hospital Trust's proposed National Health Service lottery, it appears to be a private matter and, as far as we can make out, it seems to be legal. If it raises extra money for the Health Service, that will be a very good thing. Of course, DHSS Ministers will not seek to recover any money forthcoming from the trust by adjusting health authority cash limits—it will be extra money. What the trust wishes to do and whom it wishes to join its numbers is a matter for itself.

Q2. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 21 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. and learned Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Campbell: The Prime Minister will be aware of the tragic occurrence late yesterday afternoon when a Phantom aircraft of 43 Squadron flying from RAF Leuchars in my constituency was lost. I am sure that the Prime Minister will wish to join me in expressing sympathy to the families of the missing crewmen. I understand that the wreckage of the Phantom aircraft was found by a Wessex aircraft of 222 Squadron flying a search and rescue operation.

Since 1956 more than 2,000 such operations have been flown from RAF Leuchars—57 of them this year—and more than 2,000 lives have been saved. In the light of that, will the Prime Minister confirm that there is no risk, or even likelihood, that search and rescue operations will be withdrawn from RAF Leuchars?

The Prime Minister: I join the hon. and learned Gentleman in expressing sympathy to the relatives of those two young men who lost their lives when the Phantom crashed into the sea yesterday.

As the hon. and learned Gentleman is aware, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is conducting a review of the air sea rescue services. When he has completed that review, of course he will report his conclusions to the House and to the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Q3. **Mr. Sackville:** To ask the Prime Minister of she will list her official engagements for Thursday 21 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Sackville: Will my right hon. Friend commend the wisdom and courage of the Government of Kuwait? Does she agree that those Governments who fail to learn the lesson that terrorism must be resisted at any cost expose their own citizens and all of us to the most appalling risks?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I endorse what my hon. Friend has said. I think it is excellent that the 17 prisoners are still in gaol in Kuwait. It is a policy that we urged upon the Government of Kuwait—not to give in to any blackmail involving hijacking. Various countries have accepted obligations when hijacks occur. That is why my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary will be raising the implications of hijacks with his European colleagues in the Foreign Affairs Council next week. We have also been in touch with our Summit Seven partners to propose further discussions in that forum. Thirdly, our delegation to the International Civil Aviation Organisation will be raising the matter of hijacking and the question of what action to take.

Mr. Boateng: Will the Prime Minister take time this afternoon to dissociate herself from the disgraceful remarks of her right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) in his outrageous attack on the front-line states, which she visited recently, and which we understand she will visit again? Will she respond to the profound moral challenge from Archbishop Tutu and at last recognise that the only way forward for non-violent change in South Africa is the immediate implementation of comprehensive sanctions?

The Prime Minister: I read my right hon. Friend's speech in full. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has done the same. My right hon. Friend made it quite clear that economic freedom and political freedom are indivisible and he said to South Africa:

> "So you have a hard choice before you. The very economic success that your political system seeks to preserve will before long be destroyed by the policies you are following to preserve your political system."

He made it quite clear that each and every person has equal rights to consideration, and he really made it very clear to South Africa that we detest apartheid as a system.

Q4. **Mr. Kirkhope:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 21 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Kirkhope: As today is the 40th anniversary of the creation of the state of Israel, a country which has had turbulent times throughout its existence and which has often acted as a democratic refuge for people who have been persecuted elsewhere in the world, will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating all the people of Israel on their achievements, and will she also join me in hoping that it will not be another 40 years before a peace settlement is found for the middle east that recognises the right of Israel to exist?

The Prime Minister: I readily join my hon. Friend in congratulating Israel on its 40th anniversary. Israel's achievements in that period have been remarkable. I agree with him that that makes it all the more important that those who built the nation should now help to build peace with security for all countries in the region.

Mr. Kinnock: I support the Prime Minister's last reply.

May I point out to her that a 73-year-old widow in my constituency has lost all her housing benefit because she owns a house that she has been trying unsuccessfully to sell for 20 months? Out of a total income of £41·67 a week she now has to find a rent for her pensioner flat of £32·74. Can the Prime Minister tell me and my constituent how that old lady can live on less than £10 a week?

The Prime Minister: I think that the right hon. Gentleman is referring to a number of cases, where there is lapse of time between when a house is put on the market and when it can be sold. There used to be a provision to cover that gap. Unfortunately, it was not properly used. Therefore, the rules were changed. If there is any difficulty in that particular case, I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will be taking it up with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Kinnock: But there is difficulty in that particular case. That is why I took it up with the DHSS, and that is why it replied that this lady

> "will still be entitled to a Retirement Pension of £41·67 a week. I am sorry that I have been unable to alleviate . . ."

—I leave out the lady's name because I do not want publicity for her—

> "anxieties."

I shall show that reply to any hon. Member on the Conservative Benches who wishes to see it, but I am sure that they have received similar correspondence. As the regulations would be properly used if changes were made, to take the Prime Minister's point, again I ask her to change the regulations so as to lift people such as my constituent and thousands like her out of the anxiety, the fear and the poverty into which the changes have now plunged them.

The Prime Minister: No. The reason why I said, "If there is any difficulty" is perfectly plain, and I shall explain it to the right hon. Gentleman. If a person has an asset such as a house which is on the market, it should not be difficult to raise money in the form of a loan from the bank on the strength—*[Interruption.]* If a person has a very considerable asset such as a house, it should not be difficult to raise a modest loan on the valuation of that asset.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister does not live in the real world. The house of which I speak cannot be sold, and has not been sold for 20 months. Can the Prime Minister recommend which building society or what source of credit would enable my constituent to raise an additional mortgage at 73 years of age to provide her with the kind of sum that would enable her so to supplement her income in order to live a civilised life?

The Prime Minister: It would be a loan on the security of an asset, which is a perfectly well understood transaction, and usually provided for by the banks of this country.

Q6. **Mr. Stevens:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 21 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Stevens: Has my right hon. Friend seen reports recently that the Scottish TUC is to mount a campaign of opposition and boycotting of the Government's new programme for training the long-term unemployed, a matter which I understand will be voted on by committees of the English TUC next week? Will she condemn the wholly negative approach of the Scottish TUC, which, if supported by the English TUC, would be a major threat to the training opportunities for some 60,000 unemployed people?

The Prime Minister: I saw the report about the Scottish TUC, to the effect that it is objecting to the new training programme. I think that it would be absolutely disgraceful if any union objected to helping a person to get training —the very training that he may need to help him to secure one of the many jobs available for skilled people—especially as the unions are part of the Manpower Services Commission, which approved that programme. I hope that the unions will support the programme in the end.

Mr. Terry Lewis: Will the Prime Minister inform the House how she regards the old and disabled couple in my constituency who have no assets to sell and whose rent is being increased from £1·66 to £35 a week, because of the housing benefit cut? Will she please explain to them how they will live from now on?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, I have said that detailed cases should be taken up with my right hon. Friend—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is aware that even after the changes more money is being spent on housing benefit in real terms than in 1979, and still every two households are having to support not only themselves, but keep a third. The amount of money spent on housing benefit is greater by a good deal than in 1979.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): Will the Leader of the House state the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 25 APRIL—Completion of remaining stages of the Local Government Finance Bill [5th Allotted Day].

Motion relating to the Local Government (Prescribed Expenditure) (Amendment) Regulations.

TUESDAY 26 APRIL—Second Reading of the Finance (No. 2) Bill.

Motion on the Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-range and Shorter-range Missiles (Inspections) (Privileges and Immunities) Order.

WEDNESDAY 27 APRIL—Opposition day (10th Allotted Day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion entitled "The hardship caused by the house benefit changes".

Consideration of Lords Amendments to the Licensing Bill.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at Seven o'clock.

THURSDAY 28 APRIL—Second Reading of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Bill *[Lords]*.

Motion on the Summer Time Order. Details of the EC document relevant to the debate will be given in the *Official Report*.

FRIDAY 29 APRIL—Private Members' Bills.

[Debate on Thursday 28 April: Relevant European Community Document: 9584/87, Summer Time; Relevant report of European Legislation Committee: HC 43-xv (1987-88), para 4.]

Mr. Kinnock: I am grateful to the Leader of the House for his statement. We shall have a short debate in Opposition time next week on the hardship caused by the loss of housing benefit, which is just one of the sources of great anxiety and poverty arising from this month's social security changes.

Can the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether he will provide shortly a whole day of Government time for a debate on the changes, now that they are in being and already showing tragic effects, which even most of the Government could not have intended?

Following the report this week on teachers' pay, which reveals great problems of recruitment and supply of trained and qualified teachers in vital subjects including maths, sciences and computing, will the Leader of the House make arrangements for an urgent debate on the whole question of teachers' pay, conditions and qualifications?

In view of the annual report that was published yesterday by Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons, which graphically illustrated the unprecedented crisis in our prisons, described by the chief inspector himself as, "bordering on the intolerable", may we have a full debate in the near future on the situation in the prison service?

When can we expect the promised debate in Government time on the future of the Rover Group? Will the right hon. Gentleman also arrange for an urgent full day's debate on the future of community care, covering the Griffiths and Wagner reports?

Given the anxiety being expressed over the Government's internal review of child benefit, can we have an urgent statement on the nature of the review, its terms of reference and whether the Government are considering taxing or means-testing that method of help for families, which, as the Leader of the House knows, is regarded as vital by people in all parties.

In view of the implications for the future of workers and skills at Govan Shipbuilders and the rest of British Shipbuilders, which will arise from the sale of Govan Shipbuilders to Kvaerner Industries of Norway and because of the urgent need to clarify arrangements relating to the building of type 23 frigates, can the Leader of the House assure us that there will be a full day's debate on shipbuilding at the earliest possible time?

Mr. Wakeham: The right hon. Gentleman has asked seven questions and I shall do my best to answer him. He asked for a full day's debate on the social security changes. There is an Opposition day next week and they have chosen to debate the aspect that they consider to be most important. I recognise that there are other matters that they wish to discuss, but I cannot promise an early debate on that matter.

We have had a number of debates about teachers' pay. There are implementations of the award that has just been announced, and obviously, it is a matter to which we will have to return. Again, I cannot promise an early debate.

There was an announcement by the Home Secretary recently on the condition of prisons. I said then that I hoped that there would be an opportunity for a debate in the near future. That is something we can discuss through the usual channels. Indeed, that was much the same as I said the day before on the question of the Rover Group and the arrangements that have been made there.

The right hon. Gentleman also asked about community care. There are two reports, the Griffiths report and Lady Wagner's report, both of which are being studied. That is the best way to proceed at the moment. I shall pass on to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services the question about the review of child benefit. I am sure that a statement will be made at the appropriate time when the review has been completed. However, I cannot promise a debate in the near future.

On the matter of Govan shipyard, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said earlier this week, the negotiations have only just started. He undertook to keep the House fully informed of any developments. The necessity for a debate may well arise. I shall certainly discuss that through the usual channels.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Could we have an early debate on the procedure of the House in view of the difficulty that many Back Benchers are experiencing in being called during major debates? Certain parliamentary conventions mean that the same people are called time and time again simply because they are Privy Councillors.

Mr. Wakeham: The question of who is called in a debate is not a matter for me. I know, Mr. Speaker, that you go to a great deal of trouble to ensure that you call as many hon. Members as possible in a debate and from as wide a cross-section of opinion as possible. As my hon. Friend will know, I have tabled a motion to make

arrangements for reducing speeches to 10 minutes on certain occasions. I hope that we can proceed with that in the near future.

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): A few minutes ago the Prime Minister did not quote those sections of the speech of the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) which managed to be offensive to the racial majority in South Africa and the racial minority in this country at the same time. Will the Leader of the House recognise that when the right hon. Gentleman is such a recent member of the Cabinet and chairman of the governing party, there is a responsibility on the Government to distance themselves from those repulsive remarks? Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for that to be done?

Mr. Wakeham: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman has read the speech in full. I have not read it in full, but my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has. I thought that she quoted some important parts of it and I do not think that I have anything to add to what she said.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): May I allude to another motion standing in my right hon. Friend's name which is welcome to many Members on both sides of the House—namely, the motion dealing with the presentation of petitions? I want to ask whether it would be possible for this motion to be debated before 6 May, as a number of us on both sides of the House are concerned that another attempt may be made to defeat the Abortion (Amendment) Bill procedurally rather than allowing the House to decide properly what its will is. I believe that, after last night, many people feel that the House's standing in the country is not all that great at the moment, and it would be regarded as a tremendous shame if this Bill were not brought to a proper democratic vote because of procedural wrangles.

Mr. Wakeham: As my hon. Friend knows, I have also tabled a motion to deal with that recommendation of the Select Committee on Procedure, and I would like to proceed with that as soon as possible. I believe that there would be a great deal of anger in the House if anybody sought to promote a case by procedural means rather than proper arguments. Whether or not we find time, I certainly hope that that method will not be used on that occasion.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Would the Leader of the House invite the Secretary of State for Social Services to make a statement on the Social Security Advisory Committee's recommendations regarding the need for emphysema, bronchitis and associated diseases to be prescribed diseases? Is he aware that thousands of miners and others in associated industries are affected by these diseases and that, despite all the Bills that have been brought before Parliament in recent years, they have been rejected? Would he ask the Secretary of State for Social Services to come along, complete with his preacher's voice and all the rest of it, so that we can examine and question him on the need to get this made law?

Mr. Wakeham: Even when the hon. Gentleman has a good or arguable case, he does not always present it in the most persuasive way. Nevertheless, I recognise that there is a serious question there and I will certainly refer it to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): My right hon. Friend will recall that I asked him a few weeks ago whether he would urgently consider the possibility of allowing time for a debate on agriculture since that industry is at present in a state of demoralisation and crisis and the only debate that we have supposedly had on that subject in this Session was taken up entirely with discussion of a single Brussels summit. May I ask my right hon. Friend where he now stands in his deliberations on that matter?

Mr. Wakeham: My spirit is as willing as it ever was, and I intend to have a debate on agriculture as soon as I can, but, as my hon. Friend will recognise, we have had a number of important debates recently and finding time for it is not as easy as I would like.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I support the request by the Leader of the Opposition for a debate on shipbuilding. Will the Leader of the House recognise that the order for the super cruise liner is good news for a British shipyard and for the United Kingdom as a whole, as well as for Harland and Wolff? Might the House therefore be given an opportunity to express its view on the order, in the light of the suggestions that any public finance involved would have to come from the Northern Ireland block grant, when over 50 per cent. of the expenditure will be going to British companies in Great Britain?

Mr. Wakeham: I certainly recognise the hon. Gentleman's concern with shipbuilding and with Harland and Wolff: I know about this interesting project, which is based upon a novel design, but it is too soon to make a Government commitment to support it. No costings have yet been received by the Government. When they are received, they will be fully assessed. The question of a debate is perhaps a bit premature.

Mr. John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): My right hon. Friend will remember that last week I asked him whether he could find time for a debate on terrorism. In view of the fact that the hijackers in Algiers have got away absolutely scot-free, is not the need for a debate even more urgent now than it was before?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that this is a very serious subject and that it could well be helpful to have a debate, but, as I am sure my hon. Friend will recognise, there is a great deal of pressure on time at the moment for various debates, particularly on Government legislation, and I am afraid that I cannot offer him time immediately.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Is the Leader of the House aware that yesterday the London boroughs grants scheme launched a report called "London Under Pressure" which emphasised the problems that many people and organisations in London face since the demise of the GLC? Is he also aware that health cuts are continuing very rapidly in London and that as a result many health authorities are seeking amalgamation with neighbouring health authorities, which is leading to further potential job losses and hospital and ward closures?

In the circumstances, does not the Leader of the House think that it is important to have a special debate on the needs of London, the needs of the Health Service in London and the attitude of central Government, which is

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

nothing but contemptuous towards the needs of the many poor people in London who are suffering under the Government's policies?

Mr. Wakeham: I do not accept much of what the hon. Gentleman has said, except that he touched upon a number of important issues. As he rightly said, a report was published yesterday. We should read and study it before we consider whether it is right and proper to have a debate on the subject. Certainly his request for a debate on London is reasonable and I shall bear it in mind.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Since, during the last five suspensions of Labour Members of Parliament from the House, excluding last night, some 260 Labour Members, including the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition, three Labour Whips and at least 10 Labour Front Benchers voted against the recommendation of the Chair and only 68 voted in favour, many of us were not totally convinced by the stance of the Opposition Front Bench yesterday. This has been reinforced by the fact that two Labour Whips deliberately abstained in the vote last night. Will my right hon. Friend say what discussions he has had about that through the normal channels?

Mr. Wakeham: I thought that the debate last night, with the substantial support which the motion which I tabled received from the House, recognised how important the authority of the Chair is to the good running of Parliament. I was very pleased indeed that it was demonstrated in the way it was. The activities of members of the Opposition and the way they vote are a problem which I can refer to the Opposition Chief Whip. I do not want to add to his burdens, but that is his problem, not mine.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I draw attention to what I said last week? Business questions should be related to the business for the following week.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): When we have a debate on the Rover Group, will the Leader of the House make it clear who will respond on behalf of the Government—whether it will be the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster or the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), because the position is not clear?

Can we have an early statement at long last about the Settle-Carlisle line? The Leader of the House will know that the local authorities have agreed to advance several hundred thousand pounds to support the line. They have asked for certain criteria from the Government, such as a guarantee for a number of years of operation of the line. All the criteria are reasonable. The Government have still not come to the House with a statement about keeping the line. Now that the local authorities have yielded to a great deal of pressure and blackmail by the Government to support the line, is it not time that the Government came up with their own support to make sure that we save this magnificent 80-mile railway?

Mr. Wakeham: When the Rover Group debate is arranged, it is not a matter for me who will be called to speak. I do not want to disturb the hon. Gentleman, but under the present arrangements it seems he might have to deal with speeches from my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and from my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). I hope that that does not disturb him too much.

I recognise the hon. Gentleman's long concern and interest in the Settle railway. He knows that it is being considered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. An announcement will be made when my right hon. Friend has made up his mind how best to proceed.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): The Government have stated time after time that the community charge legislation is essential for the well-being of the people of Scotland, Wales and England. When will the Government introduce similar legislation for Northern Ireland?

Mr. Wakeham: I have to say to my hon. Friend, not next week. I will refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, but I know of no plans to do so immediately.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Is it not a disgrace that the Scottish Office, with 12,000 civil servants and a £9 billion annual budget, alone among the major Departments of State does not have a Select Committee to scrutinise its affairs? Will the Leader of the House advise the Committee of Selection that if the problem is that it cannot get Scottish hon. Members to serve on it, there is no problem? I can volunteer three for him. Will he promise the House a debate on this whole sorry affair?

Mr. Wakeham: I know of the interest in the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. I understand that the Chairman of the Committee of Selection, whose responsibility it is, will be writing to me later today, and I think the position might best be reviewed when I have received that letter.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Does my right hon. Friend recall that some months ago he promised the House a debate on sport? In the light of the blackmailing tactics and, in the words of Daley Thompson, the cheating tactics now being employed by the International Amateur Athletics Federation against Miss Zola Budd and the British Amateur Athletics Board, would it not be a good idea to have a debate on sport to get rid of the hypocrisy and bigotry of those who are far more interested in politics than sport? May I recommend to my right hon. Friend early-day motion 973, standing in my name, which has more than 150 signatures in favour of its spirit?

[That this House urges the British Amateur Athletics Board to reject the International Amateur Athletics Federation's recommendation that Miss Zola Budd be suspended from international competition; and believes that each governing body of sport should be able to select any competitor free from political or outside pressure, particularly when that athlete is proved innocent of any offence under international rules.]

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that a debate on sport is desired in a number of quarters in the House, and I would arrange one if I could see time for it, but I do not see that in the immediate future. However, I shall certainly bear it in mind. The Government remain committed to the Gleneagles agreement. The position of Miss Budd is, of course, a matter for the British Amateur Athletics Board and the International Amateur Athletics Federation.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): The Leader of the House will recall that, at Question time on Tuesday, the Prime Minister referred to those who are putting pressure on the British Amateur Athletics Board to consider the eligibility of Miss Budd as "rather repugnant"? Was the Prime Minister aware that 23 countries had unanimously agreed that decision of the IAAF, including the United States and West Germany? May we have a debate specifically on the Gleneagles agreement so that the House can once again reaffirm its commitment and reassure the rest of the world?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot be more forthcoming to the hon. Gentleman than I was to my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle). As to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said on Tuesday, when she makes a statement from the Dispatch Box she says what she believes to be right and not always necessarily what other nations think is comfortable to hear.

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): In the case of Miss Budd, will my right hon. Friend accept that I may be a little prejudiced, as the only South African to get to the tape ahead of me in a Commonwealth games was disqualified for cheating? Be that as it may, will he accept that it is inconceivable, after all the controversy over the years about Miss Budd, that she returned to South Africa and attended an athletics meeting—where she was bound to be greeted as a celebrity by those in favour of apartheid —without realising that that was bound to create real problems for herself and for British athletes generally? Is my right hon. Friend aware that many British athletes regard that as a deliberate and extremely selfish act?

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. Friend has followed these matters over many years since the days, not so long ago, when he was a distinguished athlete himself. What he says is what he believes to be true. All I can say is that, listening to the arguments, there seems to be a considerable amount of controversy about this case; but I must repeat that this is a matter for the British Amateur Athletics Board and the International Amateur Athletics Federation, and not a matter for the Government to resolve.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): To return to the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, may I advise the Leader of the House not to take the offer from the Scottish National party too seriously? During the last Parliament, when the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs was sitting, it was difficult to get SNP hon. Members to sit on that Committee or, indeed, on any other.

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there is deep discontent that the only Department of Government that is not subject to the scrutiny of a Select Committee is the Scottish Office? The Leader of the House is under an obligation by resolution of the House to set up that Committee. Will he accept that he has a duty to come to the House and make a statement as soon as he receives the letter from the Chairman of the Committee of Selection so that we can question him closely and ensure that the Committee is set up?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman will have heard me say that I do not propose to say any more on that subject until I have received a letter from my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) who is the Chairman of the Committee of Selection. When I have received that letter, I shall consider what it says and decide how best to proceed. If there is a question about the need for a debate, it can be discussed through the usual channels.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): Further to the questions from the hon. Members for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) and for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing), does my right hon. Friend agree that a debate on the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs would be welcome on the Conservative Benches so that, for example, I could explain that I do not propose to waste my time in that Select Committee, but prefer to defend my constituents against the absolute arrogance of the leader of the Strathclyde regional council in writing abusive letters to local ministers and making it clear that he will not reply to letters from my constituents about school reorganisation?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend adds weight to the demands of which the usual channels will have to take note when deciding whether there is a need for a debate on that matter. One thing is certain: that we do not need to have a debate on the merits in business questions.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): Will the Leader of the House please find time for a debate as soon as possible on a matter that is important to my constituency and, indeed, to other parts of Scotland—the proposed increase in the weekly closing time for salmon net fishermen? We should really like to debate that because it is due to come into effect at the beginning of May and will be enormously damaging to that industry.

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot promise an early debate on that subject, although I recognise its importance. However, I remind the hon. Lady that there are Scottish questions on Wednesday and she could question my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland on that subject, if that would be of any help.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): My right hon. Friend will know that yesterday my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced an inquiry into the workings of the M25—or, to be precise, its inadequacies. In view of the representations that have been made by north-east Members of Parliament of all persuasions on the need for a motorway on the east of England from the south to the north, will my right hon. Friend make it his business to see that we have an urgent debate on the subject, and that the Minister is not advised by the same stupid civil servants who gave him advice on the M25 but listens to some of the business men and representatives from the north-east of England who know how much that would mean to regional policy and how much better it would be than some of the projects on which money has been wasted over many years?

Mr. Wakeham: I am sure that my hon. Friend would want to be fair. The advice on how to build the M25, its size and so on, was taken long before the present Secretary of State for Transport was in the House, when others had responsibility for the matter. However, I recognise my hon. Friend's concern. I shall refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport but I regret that I connot promise an early debate on the subject.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontyfract and Castleford): May I refer the Minister to his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) on emphysema among mineworkers? Is he aware that I have received a

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letter from the Secretary of State for Social Services informing me that the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council has reported to him that it is not recommending that the disease should be prescribed? Will he request the Secretary of State to publish that report and provide time in the House for a debate on it so that we can ascertain why?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise the hon. Gentleman's concern and I shall certainly refer the matter and the question of publishing the report—if that is normal practice—to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services. I shall certainly see what can be done so that the hon. Gentleman will know more about the advice that my right hon. Friend has received.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): With regard to ——

Mr. Skinner: What a scandal. Miners are coughing their lungs up.

Mr. Holt: Shut up, Skinner.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Both hon. Members.

Mr. Latham: With regard to next Thursday's debate on summer time, will the Minister in charge of that order make it clear that he has no intention of asking the House to go back to all-year-round summer time, which was abandoned in 1971, since that would be disastrous for the building industry, for farmers and for many people in industry in the north and in Scotland? Will he tell those yuppies who want to ring Europe that they can get up an hour earlier and use their car telephones at Virginia Water station?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend makes his point well, but I fear that the order that we shall be discussing is of somewhat more limited scope; it refers to British summer time beginning on 26 March 1989 and ending on 29 October 1989, although the wider issues may well arise in the debate, subject to your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Will the Leader of the House consider getting either the Secretary of State for Scotland or the Secretary of State for Energy to comment on the reductions in employment in the headquarters of the coal industry in Scotland? Could he perusade them to give us some further information regarding the state of negotiations between the South of Scotland electricity board and British Coal about the coal uptake for power station consumption in Scotland? Does he accept that right now, because of the perhaps understandable cuts in manpower, morale in the Scottish coalfield is extremely low and we need an urgent statement and a clear indication that the SSEB intends to burn coal produced in Scotland in Scottish power stations?

Mr. Wakeham: I shall certainly refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. We have long regarded it as a priority that the nation's coal consumers should have access to reliable and economically produced supplies of coal, from whatever source. Provided that British Coal can get costs down, it has every chance of remaining the supplier of choice.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): A clause in the Copyright, Designs and Patents Bill [*Lords*] would have the effect of depriving this House of one of its most important, ancient and hallowed privileges, namely, the control of its domestic affairs—in this case the control of its recorded, filmed, televised and photographed events. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that on Second Reading on Thursday a Minister justifies this proposal that we should give up our ancient rights?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend and I have had some correspondence about this matter. I shall certainly refer it to my right hon. Friend before the debate next Thursday so that he can make the position clear in that debate, and it may well be debated during the passage of the Bill.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): Will the Leader of the House make time next week for a statement from the Secretary of State for Education and Science about the severe threat felt by medical research charities such as the Friedrich's Ataxia Group, which feel that the imposition of overhead costs on them by the universities, which are themselves threatened with financial crisis, would do much to destroy the valuable research work that they do?

Mr. Wakeham: I can only say that I shall refer this matter to my right hon. Friend and if he thinks it appropriate to make a statement, I am sure that he will.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend arrange an early debate on the dignity of man, having regard to the continuing and unpleasant practice of paupers' graves? Is he aware that at this moment there are two open graves in the Hanwell cemetery on the edge of my constituency, which will take five or six people with 6 in of soil between them? That causes great distress and has done for many years. Is it not time that the practice was ended? In view of the local authority's remit in this, would my right hon. Friend help me to secure money from Ealing council by stopping its proposed spending of £980 on an evening for lesbians on 7 May and put that money into a dignified burial for our citizens?

Mr. Wakeham: I will give my hon. Friend any help that I properly can to pursue the matter but I cannot promise him a debate on it next week.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): May we have a debate on the Government's unworthy policy of keeping secret many documents more than 40 years old concerning the deaths of British service men and prisoners of war? Why is it that the three Government investigations taking place at the moment are all secret? One of them concerns war criminals who live in this country, one concerns the involvement of President Waldheim in the deaths of prisoners of war and the third, announced today, concerns the alleged mass murderer General Mohnke? Why should they be secret? Why are the documents not available? What are the Government covering up, and should we not have a debate on the matter?

Mr. Wakeham: I am sorry that I cannot promise the hon. and learned Gentleman a debate. Decisions about what should be secret and what should be made public are based on long-standing conventions and rules in this place and I am not in a position to change them. I shall certainly refer the hon. and learned Gentleman's remarks to the

appropriate quarter but I can see an important case for conducting such inquiries in private to avoid the possibility of injustice.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): When my right hon. Friend receives the report from the Chairman of the Committee of Selection, will he bear in mind the fact that I have been accused by the Scottish National party of having cheated the electorate at the general election? In fact, I made it quite clear that I would not serve on the Committee and I gave my reasons. I would welcome the opportunity of a debate to draw attention to the inconsistency of the SNP on these matters and to make it quite clear why I and others need time to defend our interests against the lies put out about us in our constituencies.

Mr. Wakeham: I have no doubt that if my hon. Friend should catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, he will make his point clearly. I would certainly acquit him of any charge of cheating or of not making his own position abundantly clear to anybody who would listen to him.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): My question arises from the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) earlier today. Do the Government accept that there is an obligation on any British Administration to ensure that those held responsible for atrocities against British troops in the last war are brought to justice? Will there be a statement about the person named by my hon. Friend? Why should a notorious Nazi mass killer and Hitler pimp be allowed to go scot-free and live in comfort in Germany instead of being brought to justice?

Mr. Wakeham: I do not think that I can add to what was said earlier. I understand that the House was told by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary that the material in the possession of the Ministry of Defence is being urgently re-examined following the representations made by the hon. Member for Perry Barr. That would seem to me to be the right way to proceed, and I do not think that I can add anything further.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): My right hon. Friend will have noted the substantial falls in unemployment in the north of England. Has he also noted that councils such as Lancashire are increasing their rates by 18 per cent.? That is causing a great deal of concern as it is feared that employment prospects will be much reduced. Will he give time in the near future for a debate on industrial development in the north of England as we have not had such a debate for some time?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that this is an important subject. I note my hon. Friend's concern about the policies of certain county councils, and he makes the point very well.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In view of early-day motions 228, 253, 272, 273, 279, 286, 622 and 627, and as, for some strange unfathomable reason, the Prime Minister will not be answering the Adjournment debate tomorrow on the conduct of her private office, could we have an assurance that the Minister answering for the Civil Service will have been fully and frankly briefed by Mr. Ingham and Mr. Powell about their total role in the Westland affair?

[That this House notes in the book, Campaign, by Rodney Tyler, the Selling of the Prime Minister: from behind the doors of Downing Street and Conservative Central Office—A unique inside account of the Battle for Power that the author on page 1, chapter 1, paragraph 1, sentence 1, states 'It was an extraordinary turnaround in fortunes from the moment on 27th January 1986 when Mrs. Thatcher secretly confided to a close associate that she might have to resign . . .' and on page 3 that 'On the eve of the crucial Westland debate she herself felt shaky enough to doubt her future' though some around her later sought to dismiss this as late evening anxieties of the sort that had disappeared the following morning. It is certainly true that if Leon Brittan had chosen to, he could have brought her to the brink of downfall, by naming the real culprits inside Number 10. Instead, he chose to remain silent', and calls on the Prime Minister to give a full account of what transpired between 3rd January and 27th January 1986, at Number 10 Downing Street, in relation to the selectively leaked Law Officer's letter concerning the Westland Affair.]

[That this House notes that the Member for Aldershot on page 136 of his book Heseltine: the unauthorised Biography, states in relation to the Westland Affair that 'John Wakeham issued an order of the day which contained the trite, if effective message, that it was time for all good men to come to the aid of the party'. We did and calls on the Leader of the House, The Right Honourable Member for South Colchester and Maldon, to explain when he first knew the role of the then Trade and Industry Secretary, The Right Honourable Member for Richmond, Yorks, in the matter of the disclosure of a selectively leaked Law Officer's letter.]

[That this House notes that in his book Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution, published this week by Jonathan Cape and Co., Mr. Peter Jenkins writes, on page 200 'Brittan himself refused to enlighten the Select Committee on any point of substance. However, he is reputed to have told close friends subsequently that not only has she known perfectly well what had happened but that, on the day following the leak, had expressed her satisfaction to him at the way things had been handled. However at that time, the downfall of Heseltine had not been achieved. . . . He (Mr. Brittan) might point the finger at her (Mrs. Thatcher). Potentially he now had the power to destroy her'; and calls on the Prime Minister to give the House a full account of her conversations with the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the Right Honourable Member for Richmond, Yorks, over the period from 3rd January and 27th January 1986, in relation to the selectively leaked Law Officer's letter concerning the Westland Affair.]

[That this House notes that in The Thatcher Years—A decade of Revolution in British Politics, published by BBC Books, Mr. John Cole, on page 170, considering the selectively leaked Law Officer's letter in the Westland Affair, writes 'why did he (Sir Robert Armstrong) not give her a quick interim report when he discovered that the leak was an inside job, authorised by her office? Why did Leon Brittan not tell her? Or the private secretary concerned? Or his chief, who sits in the same room? Or her press secretary? And why did she never ask?'; and calls on the Prime Minister to inform the House of the answers to these questions.]

[That this House notes that, in the book 'Not with Honour—The Inside Story of the Westland Scandal', on page 142, Magnus Linklater and David Leigh write that 'Instead, following Havers's complaint, she spoke privately to Brittan about the leak. Although this is something the Prime Minister has failed to disclose, to widespread disbelief, the evidence comes from an authoritative source,

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

who told us: "The Prime Minister knew about the leak. She was pleased it had been done. There was a meeting between Brittan and her after the complaint from Mayhew. Only the two of them were present . . . Brittan assumed she knew of [the leak's] origins. You must draw your own conclusions."' One of Brittan's friends adds, "Nobody thought it was a problem. The complaints were out of the public domain and any inquiry was expected to be a formality. Leon wasn't worried at all about it."; and calls on the Prime Minister to give a full account to the House of the meeting between herself and Right Honourable Member for Richmond, Yorks, referred to therein.]

[That this House notes that in an article by Mr. Paul Foot in the Daily Mirror, dated 28th January, a Ministry of Defence official, Mr. Paul Newbigin, is quoted as having admitted witnessing the shredding and incinerating of the log book of HMS 'Conqueror'; is concerned that if this statement is true, the Ministry of Defence is guilty of having established an entirely bogus investigation into the disappearance of the log book when the facts of its deliberate destruction were already known; further notes the parallel between this case and that of the leaked Solicitor General's letter in the Westland Affair, when a similar investigation was launched despite the availability in advance of all the salient facts; and calls upon the Secretary of State for Defence to set up an immediate inquiry with the genuine purpose of furnishing Parliament with a full explanation of this bizarre series of events.]

[That this House calls for a debate on the conduct of honourable and right honourable Members of the House, considering the position of back bench members who resort to unparliamentary language and Heads of Government who misuse Law Officer's letters and then display lack of conduct about what they have done.]

Could we have an up-to-date report on a matter about which I have written to the Prime Minister—the progress of the leak inquiries in relation to the contact between her own office and the Secretary of State for Education on school testing, the Scottish Office on opting out and the latest difficulty over the poll tax with the Department of the Environment?

Mr. Wakeham: I doubt whether the hon. Gentleman will get all that in answer to tomorrow's debate—whoever answers it. The Minister who replies to the debate tomorrow will be well briefed and will give a very good answer, but it may not satisfy the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The Leader of the House will be aware that over two days next week the NATO Nuclear Planning Group meeting will be held in Kolding in Denmark. On the agenda will be a proposal from the Government for lots of new nuclear weapons. After Nuclear Planning Group meetings in the past, the Government have not been particularly honest with the House or with the electorate. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement at an early and convenient time about the result of this meeting?

Mr. Wakeham: To make allegations of that sort, which I totally repudiate, is not the way to try to get me to arrange a debate on the subject. Nevertheless, I shall forgive the hon. Gentleman for that lapse from his usual standards and refer to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence the hon. Gentleman's concern that there should be a statement, but I cannot promise one.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Is the Leader of the House aware of the great disappointment felt in all parts of the House when the arts debate that we were to have on 25 May was cancelled? When are we to have a debate on the arts? Among the things that we could discuss is the giving of advice to Lady Soames. Indeed, we could possibly discuss the possibility of an Arts Council grant for the colourful socks of the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames). Will the right hon. Gentleman say that if we have such a debate it will not be held on the day of the local government elections? That has happened in the past and it is not satisfactory and would disappoint many hon. Members.

Mr. Wakeham: I am delighted to see the hon. Gentleman here. He was here at the beginning of last night's debate but then he disappeared and I thought that he might have been taken ill. I recognise his interest in the arts and his possessive attitude to some art trinkets. I hope to arrange a debate at the earliest opportunity and I recognise the hon. Gentleman's desire that it should not take place on the day of the local government elections.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): May I join those hon. Members who have pressed the Leader of the House for a debate on the shipbuilding industry—or on what remains of it? It is not just a question of the recent developments at Govan, but also of the knock-on effect on many of my constituents. In Sunderland, nearly 3,000 people are employed in the shipbuilding industry. There have been recent reports, apparently well-sourced, that the Government intend to end the public subsidy to shipbuilding. May we have an opportunity to debate that before the decision is made? Such a debate could have some influence on the decision and would be better than just hearing about the decision afterwards.

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot be any more forthcoming than I was earlier in answer to the hon. Gentleman's right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. I recognise that there may well be need for a debate on shipbuilding. We will see how we get on. I appreciate that the concern is not restricted to Govan, and that Sunderland is also concerned about these matters. I hope that the hon. Gentleman takes into account the concern of his hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) that hon. Members do not spread rumours that cause undue anxiety in what is obviously a difficult situation.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Will the Leader of the House try to understand that his complacency about the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs is wholly unacceptable to the vast majority of Scottish Members? For example, it is no secret that the letter that he awaits from the Chairman of the Committee of Selection will simply confirm the failure to find, from more than 370 Conservative Members of this unitary Parliament, five who are sufficiently interested in Scotland to man the Government side of this important Select Committee. Will the right hon. Gentleman stop dodging the question and give the House a guarantee that there will be an opportunity for a full debate on his abysmal failure in this important matter?

Mr. Wakeham: I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that it is not a sign of complacency not to comment on a letter until one has received it. Perhaps if the hon. Gentleman has received a letter meant for me he would send it round to me so that I may read it.

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): Returning to the question of merchant shipbuilding, may I say to the Leader of the House that he does not seem to understand the urgency of the situation? He talks about people spreading rumours. The most serious rumour being spread at the moment is the one that the Government persistently spread when they claim that if things are in crisis it has nothing to do with them and there is nothing that they can do about it.

We need a debate in order to point to policies that could be undertaken. For instance, at the moment there is a real prospect of a substantial order from Cuba and it is about time that the Department of Trade and Industry decided what it could do to assist. That would be better than the continual knocking campaign against North East Shipbuilders Ltd.

While the negotiations take place at Govan it is not just 3,000 jobs in Sunderland that are at stake: it is 10,000, because for every one of the 3,000 people employed directly by British Shipbuilders, there are another three dependent jobs. The situation is urgent and the Government have a responsibility and should allow a debate no later than next week.

Mr. Wakeham: Remarks like that do not help to deal with a difficult situation. The situation on the ground is about people and jobs, and words such as those used by the hon. Gentleman totally ignore the substantial sums of money, verging on £2 billion, put into the shipbuilding industry over the years by various Governments. It is incorrect to pretend that nothing has been done. This is a serious problem that merits serious interventions and will not be helped by remarks such as those of the hon. Gentleman.

Points of Order

4.7 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I raised with you the question of the rights of a Member to use our internal House systems for communicating information on the closure of a brewery while acting for that company. Your reply, Mr. Speaker, is contained in yesterday's *Hansard* and it reads:

> "Provided that that hon. Member has declared his interest in the Register of Members' Interests, it would be in order for him to put a letter on the board."—[*Official Report*, 20 April 1988; Vol. 131, c. 832.]

You then went on to refer me to the Select Committee on Members' Interests. Yesterday I did not prolong the matter, but I say now that I am a member of that Committee and can say that it is not within the responsibility of that Committee to deal with this matter.

In so far as you have said that it would be in order for that hon. Member to put a letter on the board, thereby using one of our internal House systems, may I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that this has implications in many other areas? For a start, does it now mean that an hon. Member acting for a company can use our telephones, our non-imprint stationery, our photocopying facilities, our internal message board and, indeed, our office accommodation?

In the light of your ruling yesterday, Mr. Speaker, many facilities may well be used by persons acting for organisations and companies outside the House. While I do not think that it is possible for you to rule today on this matter, I would be grateful if you would reconsider your ruling so as to reassure hon. Members that none of the facilities that I have described in my point of order can be used by people who receive money from outside the House for carrying out what they believe to be their duties.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that there is any reason at all for me to reflect on the ruling. I am sorry if I left the hon. Gentleman in any doubt about the matter yesterday. It would be quite out of order for any hon. Member to use the facilities or the stationery of the House for commercial purposes. The hon. Gentleman asked about putting letters on the board. The rule is that up to six letters may be put on the board by hon. Members.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that I can add anything to what I have said.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I understand the ruling that up to six letters may be placed on the board, but they must relate to the activities of an hon. Member carrying out his public duties. I am talking about correspondence which in this case is in the name of the Scottish and Newcastle Brewery, and which was put on the board by a Conservative Member for a Kent constituency. I believe that that was in breach of the spirit or, indeed, a direct breach of the rules with which we are all required to comply.

Mr. Speaker: I think that the hon. Gentleman could certainly draw that to the attention of the Select Committee. I have no responsibility. An hon. Member many put up to six letters on the board. I have no knowledge of the letter about which the hon. Member for

[Mr. Speaker]

Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) speaks, but the hon. Gentleman who put it there may well have had a covering note with it.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have a very heavy day ahead of us.

Mr. Skinner: I know, yes.

You, Mr. Speaker, will recall that many years ago—in 1974, I believe, between the two elections—there was a public outcry, certainly by the Tory press, when it was discovered that a relative of Harold Wilson, the then Prime Minister, had from time to time been using an office in the House of Commons for purposes that, I suppose, were not all that dissimilar from those described by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). Because he was a Labour Prime Minister and the Tory press, particularly the *Daily Mail* and one or two other newspapers, went to town, Tory Members raised the issue and the result was that my right hon. Friend at that time had to deal with the matter and presumably that was the end of it.

If it was right for a Labour Member to have to take appropriate action, it appears to me that what is good for one should be good for the other. A few years have elapsed, but I reckon that you would do well, Mr. Speaker, to look back at that period and to check what occurred. If my hon. Friend's suggestion is in any way in line with what occurred then, you might find it necessary to take appropriate action.

Mr. Speaker: I again suggest that, if that were to happen, the hon. Gentleman should draw it to the attention of the Select Committee concerned.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: But we have rules.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): On a point of order. Yesterday we had an important debate on an important subject which all of us believe is something that will reflect for a long time.

I hesitate to raise this point of order, but, at the same time, I would be neglectful of my responsibilities to myself and others if I did not.

It is only a short time ago that you, Mr. Speaker, made a ruling that, unless hon. Members presented themselves in the Chamber properly attired, you would be blind to their presence when it came to selecting speakers. Those little things all amount to the type of trouble that we had in the House and the debate that has ensued.

Today, an Opposition Member once again came scruffily into the Chamber without wearing a collar and tie, yet he was called. If, Sir, you do not abide by your own rulings, how can we ultimately expect the respect and dignity afforded to the Chamber to be maintained? Would you kindly repeat your ruling of just a few months ago, that unless Members behave and dress properly, you will not call them?

Mr. Speaker: I do not recollect having said that at all. I said that the standards in the House are important. I entirely agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about the debate last night which I hope will be a watershed in terms of the future. It was perhaps one of the best debates that we have had in the House for many a year and anyone who was present, as most hon. Members were, will share that view.

In view of my background, I am perhaps the last person to pronounce upon the dress of Members, but the House will not be surprised to hear me say that standards of dress are very important.

Orders of the Day

Local Government Finance Bill

[4TH ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

Clause 39

OCCUPIED HEREDITAMENTS: LIABILITY

4.22 pm

Mr. Robert Hicks (Cornwall, South-East): I beg to move, amendment No. 7, in page 23, line 23, at end insert—

'and

(c) abating the first £1,000 (or any lesser amount) payable per year by 50%.'.

Mr. Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take the following: Amendment No. 9, in page 23, line 33 leave out '2' and insert '10'.

Amendment No. 154, in page 23, line 37 at end insert—

'(6A) Where subsection 6 above applies, the charging authority may at its discretion remit the liability calculated by reference to the formula in subsection (5) above, and the income it forgoes in so doing shall not be deemed to have been collected for the purposes of calculating its contribution to the National Non-Domestic Rating Pool under section 51 and Schedule 7 below.'

Amendment No. 155, in page 23, line 37 at end insert—

'(6A) Where subsection (6B) below applies the chargeable amount for the chargeable day shall be calculated in accordance with the formula—

$$\frac{A \times B}{C \times M}$$

(6B) This subsection applies where on the day concerned the ratepayer is a small business.

(6C) The Secretary of State may make Regulations prescribed—

(a) the definition of small business

(b) the value for M in subsection (6A) above, and that value is to be between 1 and infinity.'

Amendment No. 10, in page 23, line 38, at end insert—

'( ) Where subsection (6) above applies, a charging authority shall have the power to make no charge on the hereditament.'.

Amendment No. 172, in schedule 6, page 97, line 5, leave out paragraphs 7 and 8.

Amendment No. 171, in clause 49, page 28, line 15, leave out 'and 1994' and insert

'1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998 and 1999'.

Amendment No. 228, in page 28, line 15, at end insert—

'(5) Any non-PLC business that can prove it is solvent and that its taxable profit is less than £20,000 per annum can claim non-domestic rate abatement by completing a form for the purpose which is counter signed by the business's accountant. The amount of the abatement to be set by the Secretary of State annually.'.

Amendment No. 270, in page 28, line 15, at end insert—

'(5) Any business not paying Corporation Tax at the higher rate can claim non-domestic rate abatement at a level set by the Secretary of State annually.'.

New clause 6—*Small businesses*—

'(1) Where subsection (2) below applies, the chargeable amount for a chargeable day as calculated in accordance with section 39(4) and (5) shall be reduced by an amount up to 100% of the sum due, on a basis to be determined by regulations made by the Secretary of State.

(2) This section applies where a hereditament is occupied by a ratepayer wholly or mainly for small business.

(3) "Small business" is to be defined in regulations, and in defining the term regard shall be had to:

(a) Whether or not the business is in the form of a PLC:

(b) The taxable profit of the business:

(c) The business's asset base: and

(d) The number of employees on the business's payroll.'.

Mr. Hicks: My hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Sir B. Rhys Williams), whose name heads this amendment, is unfortunately in hospital; hence my undertaking this task on his behalf.

The Government propose the introduction of a uniform business rate as part of their overall reform of our local government finance system. We are all aware of the inadequacies of the present arrangements, both in terms of the domestic and non-domestic ratepayers. Indeed, it has featured strongly in our deliberations in recent days.

The proposal to introduce a uniform business rate has had a mixed reception. If one considers its immediate effects, few of us can fail to be worried about the impact that it could have on the level of economic activity, with specific reference to the smaller business units in our respective constituencies.

As the House knows, I have the honour to represent a constituency in Cornwall, which is not in itself a major industrial county, but is nevertheless dependent upon a wide diversity of economic activity. In Cornwall's case, to bring it into line with a uniform national figure, an immediate increase of about 10 per cent. to 12 per cent. will be needed, but, as we know, that will be accompanied by a revaluation, the first since 1973. That combination could lead to serious disruption and damage to individual business enterprises.

That overall effect worries me. It is significant. All hon. Members have received in their post in the past few days a joint statement issued by the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, the Association of Independent Businesses, the Confederation of British Industry, the Forum of Private Business, the National Chamber of Trade, the National Federation of Self-Employed and Small Businesses and the Union of Independent Companies, about the transitional provisions for the introduction of the uniform business rate.

The business organisations supporting that statement have differing views about the desirability of a national non-domestic rate, but they are all concerned about a specific aspect—that it will lead to serious disruption or permanent damage to the business world as a whole. They have called upon the Government to take note of four particular considerations.

First, during the transitional period, the maximum annual increase in the rate bill of any individual business premises should be restricted to 10 per cent. in real terms. Secondly, the cost of the transition should be met from the Exchequer. Thirdly, the transitional period should be extended beyond the five years from 1990, although revaluations should be quinquennial. Finally, there should be an announcement of the Government's intentions on transition, prior to the implementation of the legislation.

There may be a statement this afternoon that meets some of those requirements. Since Monday night's debate, I have been with the Select Committee on European Legislation in The Hague and in Bonn. This morning I read in several British newspapers that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has,

[Mr. Hicks]

either formally or informally, made statements to the effect that, first, he is either prepared to extend or is considering extending, the period for which the transitional arrangements will apply and, secondly, that we can expect some concession in respect of the small business sector. I am not sure whether the reports that appeared in the English newspapers obtainable in The Hague this morning are correct. Nevertheless, I hope that, whatever the intentions of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, he will clarify them today.

4.30 pm

As I said, it is my wish in moving this amendment to concentrate on the impact that these proposals will have on smaller business enterprises. We are all aware that the Government, in conducting their national economic strategy in recent years, have placed great emphasis on the role of the smaller business unit in assisting the revival of our economy. Various schemes have been introduced, the great majority of them aimed at encouraging smaller business men. Ministers have consistently emphasised the seedcorn principle. Numerous success stories have been held up by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and other Ministers as examples for business men to follow.

Many would say that this strategy has been successful. It is often suggested that 1 million new businesses have been created since 1979. These have provided new employment opportunities and they have all contributed to local and regional economies as well as the national economy. We have been successful in creating new business. Of course, this has had some multiplier effects. It has, for one, dramatically increased the demand for office, factory and retail space in many parts of the United Kingdom. This unprecedented demand in certain parts of the country has led to faster than average increases in rent, which will result in higher than average increases in rateable value following revaluation. In addition, where the proposed uniform business rate results in an increased poundage for business enterprises in those areas, existing businesses could suffer still further this particularly applies to the smaller ones, which may be unable to relocate because of the essentially local nature of their business activities.

It is worth reminding the House of the system that governs the non-domestic sector, and works positively to the disadvantage of smaller business enterprise. We all know that in assessing rateable values of business premises, the square footage at the front of that business property is rated at a higher value than the area to the rear of the premises. Since smaller businesses, by definition, tend to occupy smaller premises, it follows that their properties are rated at those higher levels. The figures produced by the Inland Revenue's valuation office property market report 1987 suggest that the smaller industrial units will pay 74 per cent. more in rates per square foot than larger business units. This reflects the fact that rents will be 74 per cent. higher.

The new business rate consists essentially of two elements—the adjustment to a national figure and the revaluation. With regard to the latter, a close estimate of the projected level of the uiform business rate and thus its impact on revalued businesses can be made from the Government's statements. I refer particularly to those made by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, who said:

> "Revaluation is likely to mean that rateable values increase on average by a factor of 5, or 6 . . . The Uniform Business Rate poundage will, however, be reduced by an equal and opposite amount."

The Government have repeatedly quoted, both in statements and in responses to hon. Members, a figure of 224p in the pound for the uniform business rate, based on current rateable values and the level of expenditure of local authorities in 1987-88. Reducing this figure by an equal and opposite amount of 5·5 per cent. produces a new figure for the uniform business rate based on revalued rateable values of 41p, which, when increased by the level of inflation—say, 4 per cent. per annum—will result in a level of 46p for the uniform business rate when it is introduced in 1990.

It does not quite end there. If, as expected, local authorities increase their expenditure by more than the rate of inflation over the next three years, the uniform business rate will be that much higher. Various professional organisations and individual companies have produced figures which suggest that there will be an increase of between 45p and 52p. In other words, the statement that businesses will pay about half as much in rates as they do in rents is confirmed.

I do not wish on this occasion to quote examples from various parts of the country, but many hon. Members on both sides of the House are deeply conscious of the effect that the projected figures will have on the level of business activity in their own constituencies and local regions. That is why a suggestion has been put forward that a solution would be an abatement of 50 per cent. in the first £1,000 of rates payable, and that this would most certainly help to redress the incidence of rates on the smaller business unit.

The other advantages of this scheme are that it has no additional administrative costs, no thresholds are involved, and it would be self-financing. I accept that that would mean that the overall level of the uniform business rate would need to be increased a little. However, in view of the great emphasis placed by my right hon. and hon. Friends on the value of the contribution that the smaller business unit has made to the revival of our economy in recent years, we should acknowledge in a tangible way the real fears that small business men have expressed to us and the problems that they think will result from the changes in the arrangements.

There is another side to the coin, as is frequently the case. Many of us will know of business enterprises and business units that find it difficult to survive economically and yet, in our respective areas, perform an important social function. I refer to what one might describe as the village shop scenario. They perform an important social and economic function. We all know that they are under tremendous pressure from supermarkets and cash-and-carry stores and that the Post Office has introduced policy changes in respect of payments made to their proprietors, and so on.

Such businesses make a very important contribution to the structure of our local communities, be they urban or rural. Many are finding it economically difficult to survive and it could be that any significant increase in the level of their rates burden will place their economic viability in question.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): I come to this Bill pretty late, and perhaps the hon. Gentleman can explain his intentions. Am I correct in assuming that any redistribution in terms of abatement would place an additional imposition on other commercial ratepayers within that particular orbit of the local government revenue-gathering system?

Mr. Hicks: The hon. Gentleman has summarised the situation correctly. All businesses would be eligible for the 50 per cent. abatement of the first £1,000 for which they were eligible. However, if that fixed amount has to be raised by the commercial sector, it means that subsequently there will be an additional charge placed on the larger business unit.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): As the hon. Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) will know, I have put my name to this amendment. Much will depend on the amount of support the Government choose to give. That will be a decision for the Government to make at a later stage; it need not be a problem in respect of the amendment. I am sure that the hon. Member for Cornwall, South-East agrees that the provision is aimed at businesses such as the village post office under threat from others moving into a village and a resulting increase in property values. The same applies in town centres into which multinational or national companies have moved, increasing costs for local and family-owned businesses. There is already pressure on them to leave.

Mr. Hicks: That is the second set of conditions by which smaller business enterprises, which I am anxious to help, will benefit.

This amendment merits consideration by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, not only in the context of the very real contribution that the smaller business enterprise has played in the survival of our national economy in rural areas but in terms of the significant contribution it can make socially, as well as economically, to the stability of local communities.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): This large group of amendments embodies many important ideas. I wish to make it clear that we do not accept the principle of a national business tax. I cannot for the life of me understand why many Conservative Members are willing to accept that concept, especially as one of the principal arguments behind the Bill is improving local accountability. How can a national business tax, which is under the control not of the Secretary of State for the Environment but of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, improve local accountability? It will totally divorce local authorities and break the relationship that this Government have rightly sought to build between local authority decision-taking and budgets and local business communities. That was an important and welcome development, but this Bill will destroy it.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I fail to follow the logic of the hon. Gentleman's argument. It would be logical if businesses had a vote, but they do not. Therefore, the accountability argument does not apply. There will be continuing consultation, as my right hon. Friend has made clear in Committee. That is a different matter from accountability resulting out of taxation.

4.45 pm

Dr. Cunningham: I regret giving way just to hear the vacuous statement that business does not have a vote. Every adult in our plural democratic society, under universal franchise, has a single vote. What is the alternative to what the hon. Gentleman refers, when he says that businesses do not have a vote? Everyone has a vote. I am not aware of any proposal, even from the hon. Gentleman, to change that.

When the Government say there will somehow be an improvement in accountability in local authority decision-taking, that cannot possibly be the case when Ministers are taking powers centrally to determine the level of the tax.

Mr. John Hannam (Exeter): Rubbish!

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman says, "Rubbish," but that is what is being proposed. It is also proposed that there should be no change in the amount of money collected. We have heard from Conservative Members time after time that businesses have been under crippling financial burdens. The level of those burdens will not be altered in any way by the Bill. The Minister for Local Government made it plain that the totality of the tax being collected will remain exactly the same. He is suggesting that the burdens will be shifted about and that the alleged onerous burdens in the north will be transferred to the south—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Conservative Members say, "Hear, hear," but I am not so sure that their right hon. and hon. Friends in the constituencies so affected will be saying it with quite the same gusto.

The Secretary of State for the Environment has said —I understand why—that he wants to speak later rather than earlier, no doubt to try to head off a fourth day of revolts by his right hon. and hon. Friends in the Lobbies. We have seen some papers being passed around the Chamber, and no doubt we shall learn more in due course. However, he is now saying that any scheme to mitigate the implications of the proposals on business in the south will have to be paid for by business in the north. In other words, the alleged claim that the burden will be reduced will disappear.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): There is a substantial burden on business in my part of the world, caused by the huge increase of 36·5 per cent., or 18·5 per cent., in the rate this year. That was something for which those businesses could not plan. Once the business rate is made uniform and rises only in line with inflation, it will reduce the incentive for county councils such as Lancashire to raise the rate, because they will no longer be able to milk business.

Dr. Cunningham: Yesterday we discussed rating increases and local control, and I do not want to reopen that debate. If the hon. Lady is saying that those "huge" burdens are so damaging, she had better address her remarks to her colleagues in Conservative councils around the country. In the constituency of the Minister for Local Government, Tory-controlled Shepway——

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): We have heard it all before.

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman says, "We have heard it all before." We have heard it all before from the

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other side of the House—again and again. Apparently, when Labour or alliance councils increase rates by large amounts, that is thought to be disgraceful, incompetent, profligate or extravagant. But when Tory councils do the same, that is somehow different. I do not understand it.

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman—courteous as usual—for giving way. Can he confirm that a Labour Government would revalue business premises and keep the present business rate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Can we stick to the amendment? We have enough work as it is without going into other matters.

Dr. Cunningham: At the risk of incurring your wrath, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall reply to the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh). We are committed to keeping a property tax, but that is what the Bill will provide. This is a property tax. I am not sure what point the hon. Gentleman is making.

As I said in Committee, the introduction of a property tax will mean modernising the base on which it operates, and that means revaluation. It would not make sense otherwise. We agree with the Government about that, and I am more than happy to put our agreement on record.

Mr. Leigh *rose*——

Dr. Cunningham: No, I shall not give way again. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have rightly asked me to move on and deal in more detail with the amendment, and that is what I now intend to do.

As I have said, we believe that the Government are creating a nationally controlled tax in the hands of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. That is made clear in Government amendment No. 179, which gives the Chancellor control over the tax. Government amendment No. 104 makes it clear that the tax will be paid into the Consolidated Fund.

Schedule 5(2)(7)(e), states that

"matters affecting the amenity of the locality of the hereditament (including transport services and other facilities)"

will be taken into account in the fixing of the tax. That means that if a well-managed local authority—whatever its political control—provides good, effective, efficient services, the result will be an increase in the tax. As the level of provision goes up, the tax is likely to do the same, and there will be nothing that the local authority can do about it other than to reduce the quality of services, or eliminate them altogether. I assume that that is not what Conservative Members, or even sensible business people, want.

As I have also made clear, the Bill as it stands does not provide for a statutory requirement for business consultations between local authorities. I cannot understand why Conservative Members find all this so attractive. Of course, the answer is that many of them do not, and that also goes for many people in business communities.

Our amendment No. 155 and new clause 6 aim to provide for regulations to allow a discount of up to 100 per cent. to be available to small businesses. I recommend new clause 6 to the House for it enshrines an important new principle. I am persuaded, as is the Labour party, that existing burdens on small businesses can be very damaging, and they will continue to be so under the Government's proposals. *[Interruption.]* I shall happily give way to the Minister for Local Government if he wishes to intervene rather than mutter at me across the Chamber. Apparently he does not wish me to give way.

I cannot understand why the Government, instead of quibbling, do not accept the new clause or produce a similar new clause of their own. Regrettably, they are not persuaded of the case for a 100 per cent. rebate for individuals. As there seems to be far more concern on the Conservative Benches about businesses than about individuals and families, perhaps before we vote they will reflect on that.

New clause 6 spells out the proposal to introduce a 100 per cent. rebate, or at least to make it available for small businesses.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): It is not clear from the new clause who should bear the cost. Does the hon. Gentleman wish it to be borne by the rest of the businesses, or does he seek external assistance from the community charge payer or the Exchequer?

Dr. Cunningham: My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) and I are at one on that. As we have made clear, we think that larger businesses and the Government should contribute to such a scheme. As we said yesterday, we believe that the better off in society should fund a 100 per cent. discount scheme for those on low incomes.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I have some difficulty in understanding the distinction that the hon. Gentleman makes between large and small businesses. Surely the criterion is whether a business is profitable and provides employment. That one firm employs six people and makes a profit of £2 million is surely as relevant as a firm that employs 100,000 and makes a profit of £50,000. The distinction bothers me. I cannot find any credibility in it.

Dr. Cunningham: We have responded in the new clause to discussions which are still proceeding with organisations representing small business people around the country. If the hon. Gentleman, who was not a member of the Standing Committee, had found time to read the report of its proceedings, he would have been able to see in some detail why we reached those conclusions.

Amendment No. 171 would extend the period of phasing in the proposals up to 10 years. The purpose of amendment No. 172 is to point out that Government phasing slows down the rate of benefit in the north to the advantage of business in the south. As I said earlier, the Secretary of State, his Ministers and their supporters have welcomed the proposals, saying that they will bring significant benefits to business in the north. However, the Government's second thoughts now mean the erosion of those benefits.

Amendment No. 154—I said that this was a large group of amendments—deals with charitable relief, which is also affected by the Bill. We tabled the amendment to re-establish the possibility of 100 per cent. relief for voluntary organisations and charities. As the Bill stands, local authorities will not be able to give such relief. The Government say that if they wish to do so, they should do

so simply by putting the burden of the concession on poll tax payers—individuals in the community. We do not think that that is fair or reasonable. The relief should come from national taxation, not from individuals' poll tax.

This is an important point. Increasingly, because of the prevailing circumstances, individuals and families are relying on schemes organised by groups such as MIND. I am president of that organisation in my constituency. The funding of MIND, and that of many other groups, benefits significantly from local authority help. The ability to give rebates of up to 100 per cent. should be written into the Bill.

Mr. Butterfill: In Committee I tabled an amendment on this point. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would be somewhat unreasonable if his suggestion, that this should come from the Exchequer, were accepted so that there was no charge back to the community? Surely the amount that might be given by discretion of individual local authorities could vary enormously, and it would fall on the general taxpayer. Should not local communities decide whether they wish to assist charitable organisations, in the knowledge that they will have to pay for that help?

5 pm

Dr. Cunningham: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the totality of these proposals means that 75 per cent. of local government finance will be in the control of central Government. That is unprecedented in this country and is unparalleled in any democratic society. The proposals mean that for every 1 per cent. increase in expenditure, local authorities will have to increase the poll tax by 4 per cent., so a disproportionate burden will fall on individuals. That is the gearing implication of the totality of the proposals.

Of course, I do not suggest that local authorities should be absolved of all responsibility to contribute to such a scheme. We are arguing about the principle of establishing such a scheme in the Bill. We can argue and perhaps disagree about the details.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): The hon. Gentleman has mentioned the gearing effect. Will he acknowledge that it works equally in the opposite direction and, therefore, establishes a great incentive to keep local government spending down?

Dr. Cunningham: That is exactly its intention. The Government have made no secret of the fact that they want to use this way of imposing additional heavy personal burdens to achieve their manic goal of more control over everything that local government does. There is a fundamental difference between the Labour party and the Government on this point. That is why we oppose the proposals. I readily acknowledge that this is the Government's intention. In fact, I do my best to make it as clear as I can that that is exactly what the Government seek to do.

Mr. Leigh: Twister.

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Douglas: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We had an interesting debate last night, to which hon. Members have alluded. I distinctly heard the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh)—I am sure that he would not want his comment to be on the record—refer just now to my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) as a twister. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would want to withdraw that remark.

Mr. Leigh: I happily withdraw that remark. The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) is a very experienced and shrewd politician who is always capable of putting the best light on Labour party policies, whatever they may be.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I do not know what the word means but, whatever it is, it did not sound very nice.

Dr. Cunningham: I guess that everyone is very sensitive about these matters at the moment, but I cannot say that I was made too uncomfortable by what the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle said. Of course, I accept without reservation his withdrawal, whatever he said. In turn, I accept the hon. Gentleman's compliment that he thinks that I am reasonably able to portray the Labour party's policies and position. That was a generous comment.

In Committee, on 3 March 1988, the Secretary of State made this commitment:

"I turn now to amendment No. 360, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington."

I understand that the hon. Member for Kensington (Sir B. Rhys Williams) is ill and therefore cannot be present. We send him our best wishes for a speedy recovery. The Secretary of State continued:

"I am happy to tell him that I am prepared to meet that amendment on Report. He will forgive me if I seek to redraft it. I am certain that under any of the schemes that we have been discussing the transition will not be over for all businesses by 1995."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 3 March 1988; c.1215-16.]

There does not appear to be any such amendment on the Amendment Paper. I wonder why the Secretary of State has not delivered that commitment. No doubt he will say why, having promised the hon. Member for Kensington that he would table an amendment—perhaps trying to head off yet another revolt—he has not tabled such an amendment.

Mr. Ridley: Perhaps it will save time if I say that we certainly intend to put forward that amendment in another place. It has proved rather more complicated than we thought and redrafting was not completed in time for Report, but I undertake to put it forward.

Dr. Cunningham: The problem is that the amendment will be tabled in another place and we will not have the chance properly to discuss and consider it before decisions are taken and hon. Members vote in this debate. That is less than satisfactory, and I should have thought that a number of Conservative Members would think so, too.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Cunningham: I am trying to finish, but I give way.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: The hon. Gentleman will have noted, of course, that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State agrees that it is wholly proper for another place to amend the Bill.

Dr. Cunningham: That just shows the virtue of giving way. Of course I agree with the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop). I wonder whether he heard the speech last night by the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr.

[Dr. Cunningham]

Temple-Morris) about the infamous broadcast on "Today" by the Secretary of State on the ability of the other place to amend the Bill. The right hon. Gentleman spent his time talking about these proposals as a "tax" and said that was why the House of Lords should not interfere. But the right hon. Gentleman has spent the past four months telling us and the country that it is not a tax—it is a community charge. Before the other place gets the Bill, the right hon. Gentleman had better make up his mind what advice he is giving. Is it or is it not a tax? Is it a charge? We are confident that, whatever the right hon. Gentleman says it is, the other place will have the opportunity to amend this and other parts of the Bill.

It is not only the Opposition, or even some Conservative Members, who are worried about the implications of the proposals. As recently as yesterday, the Confederation of British Industry issued this statement:

"The CBI believes that for some businesses the combined effect of the Uniform Business Rate and revaluation will be catastrophic . . . Towns—like Croydon, Bromley and Bexley, and there are many others—will not be encouraged to attract firms by careful stewardship of resources".

That is true. The Bill in this form wipes out any incentive on the part of local authorities to attract businesses in the way that many of them want, whatever their political persuasion.

Groups and individual organisations representing small business people and small businesses generally remain deeply opposed to these proposals. For those reasons, we have tabled our amendments. I hope that it is possible —it will depend on what happens to the various amendments—to have a vote on new clause 6, which introduces the principle of rebates up to 100 per cent. for small businesses.

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): I was not a member of the Committee so perhaps those hon. Members who spent many hours discussing this Bill will forgive a newcomer, as it were, interposing one or two remarks that I hope will be of some value to the House.

I must say to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) that I take a more sanguine view of the uniform business rate that he appears to take. My quarrel, if it is a quarrel, with my right hon. and hon. Friends is that they are adhering too slavishly to the concept of rateable values, with all the consequential distortions that will be caused to business and to the property market.

Amendment No. 270, tabled in my name, has the same intent and objective as amendment No. 7 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Sir B. Rhys Williams). I am sorry not to see him in his place and I extend to him my good wishes and the good wishes of all my right hon. and hon. Friends and the hope that he has a speedy recovery and return to the House from hospital. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) on the points that he made in support of that amendment, with which nobody could quarrel.

My amendment is possibly closest to amendment No. 228 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) who, before coming to the House, established a reputation as a champion of small businesses. I recall receiving delegations from small market gardeners in Northern Ireland led by my hon. Friend and others in London about statutory sick pay. I hope only that my right hon. and hon. Friends will prove as flexible and helpful to my hon. Friend as I tried to be.

I am glad to note from the report of the Committee stage of the Bill that my right hon. Friend has recognised the difficulties of small businesses and is attracted to the idea of giving them help, at least during the transitional period, but I understand that he intends to do so by the use of a rateable value threshold. I do not believe that such an approach will target relief where it is properly needed. The objective of my amendment and those of my hon. Friends is to depart from the concept of rateable value to target relief where it is needed.

The amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington is directed to targeting relief at particular levels. The amendments in the names of my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay and myself seek to give a definition of small businesses and leave it to the Secretary of State annually to fix the rate of relief. My amendment differs from amendment No. 228 in that it seeks to use a machinery that is already in existence. The Inland Revenue already distinguishes between businesses which are subject to higher and lower rates of corporation tax and it would be relatively simple for it to be confirmed and certified into which category a particular business falls and the collector of rates notified accordingly.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a difficulty in that businesses' profits can vary from year to year and that, particularly for small businesses, profits can vary quite considerably? There might be a problem with fluctuation, particularly for businesses that are on the borderline. One year they might be above the threshold and the next year they might be below it and it would not be possible to verify that until a time subsequent to the year in question.

Sir Hugh Rossi: I think that they will be in difficulty in any case. If they are originally fixed to a rateable value, such businesses may never get out of that trap. In any case, whatever approach we take, there are bound to be difficulties for some people.

I am concerned to try to target the help where it is really needed. One way of doing that is by reference to the level of corporation tax. Another way would be by reference to turnover which might be easier to establish. We already have such a system with regard to VAT and that does not necessarily cause difficulties. Firms know whether they will need to register for VAT usually in advance of the year in question. A certificate of registration for VAT may itself be sufficient to trigger the relief that we are seeking to give small businesses. I am trying to argue that there are better ways of doing it than adherence to a threshold of, say, £15,000 rateable value, which I think was one of the figures discussed in Committee.

I understand on good authority that, if £15,000 rateable value were taken as the threshold, a particular retailer in this country with more than 2,000 stores would obtain relief on 85 per cent. of its outlets. Another retailer with 1,200 outlets would benefit from the lower rate for 84 per cent. of its outlets. Even if the threshold were reduced to £10,000 rateable value, 79 per cent. of one of those chains would still qualify for relief. I am not sure that that is the kind of targeting that my right hon. Friend has in mind when he is trying to devise ways of giving assistance to small businesses.

I suggest to my right hon. Friend that perhaps the distinction that needs to be borne in mind is not between small and large units but between small and large businesses. If he did that, perhaps he would not need to spend so much of his resources on the wrong target.

Having said that, I believe that my right hon. Friend has received a great deal of evidence on the possible effects of revaluation on large and small businesses and on businesses which occupy primary, secondary or tertiary trading positions. I shall not detain the House by going into all the details and technicalities.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): My hon. Friend leaves out one important category affecting hon. Members with northern constituencies. I know that we are not very well represented tonight but we must consider the fact that the more concessions that are given to other categories the more difficult it becomes for northern constituencies to benefit from the commitment given by the Minister for Local Government that we would be offered a package sufficiently dramatic to enable us to attract many more new businesses.

Sir Hugh Rossi: No doubt my right hon. Friend will answer that point. Nevertheless, if my right hon. Friend is seeking to give relief, it might be suggested to him how that relief might be more accurately targeted. It should not be crudely and arbitrarily targeted so that the money goes in the wrong direction.

I was seeking to make a point about primary, secondary and tertiary positions of trading, which is also extremely relevant. I said that I did not want to bore the House with a lot of technical detail on valuation, but I understand that, for properties in primary sites, revaluation will affect them by a factor of between 6 and 7, whereas for tertiary and secondary sites the factor is between 2 and 4.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: As my hon. Friend makes quite clear, these are all national averages. Within areas, there will be vast and extraordinary differences that can reach multiples above 20. That will have such a capricious effect that it will be totally destructive of economic purpose in regional terms.

Sir Hugh Rossi: I take my hon. Friend's point. That is why I am urging, possibly a little late in the day, that the rateable value of business premises is not the best approach. The Committee was unable to persuade the Secretary of State that the balance sheet and the profitability of a business might be a more equitable way of raising tax or a levy of this kind on businesses. We have departed a long way from that concept.

When he considers relief, my hon. Friend should bear in mind the enormous distortions that will result from the provisions. It is absolutely essential that the period during which the transitional provisions will operate and the percentage that a particular business will be required to pay over and above its existing rates should be right.

I would argue that, for businesses both large and small, we should consider a 10 per cent. increase, in real terms, over an extended period of time. Then they would be better able to organise their affairs and plan ahead. I think that my right hon. Friend knows that a group of about 10 of the largest retailers in this country have an investment programme of about £3 billion for the next three years.

By coincidence, that is roughly equivalent to the Government's inner cities development programme. These are extremely large sums of money, which, if injected into the economy, would generate an enormous amount of economic activity. As the money came in and was used by the construction industry, new stores would be opened and new jobs would be created in areas where they were required.

The uncertainty that my right hon. and hon. Friends have created in the retail industry has led to doubt about whether it should go forward with its expansion plans. Therefore, my last plea to my right hon. Friend is that he should come forward as quickly as possible with his proposals for the transitional period and that he should announce as soon as possible the increased amount that businesses will be required to pay over and above their current rates bill. If he does not do so, he will be doing a disservice to a great many people who depend upon a viable retail system to provide them both with goods at a price that they can afford and employment. I hope that my right hon. Friend will think very carefully about the way in which he gives the relief that I know he is contemplating should be given.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): I, too, was not a Member of the Committee that considered the Bill, but my constituents will be greatly affected by the legislation. I intend to speak about amendment No. 7, which would provide a 50 per cent. abatement for small businesses, new clause 6, which provides for 100 per cent. relief, and amendments Nos. 9 and 10, relating to charities that stand in my name and those of my hon. Friends.

We are strongly of the opinion that the uniform business rate will mean that local government will no longer be able to set a business rate. The fact that that rate will be set by central Government causes us considerable alarm. The relationship between local government and the rating system ought to be much stronger than it is today. The uniform business rate will undoubtedly penalise small businesses, especially in rural areas. The ability of small businesses in particular to pay the uniform business rate should be considered, just as the ability of individuals to pay the poll tax should be considered. It ought to be recognised that some small businesses do not have great ability to pay.

Typical businesses in rural areas, such as post offices, shops, filling stations and pubs, are under severe stress. The viability of such businesses is very fragile. There will be a 10 per cent. increase in the uniform business rate in Radnor, in my constituency compared with the present rating system, but in other areas the increase will be very much larger. The National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses believes that many areas will suffer a 100 per cent. increase, that others will suffer a 200 per cent. increase and that some will suffer even larger increases.

The unknown factor is revaluation. The Secretary of State has ridden into the field on his community charger in a swashbuckling way. The five-year transitional period is supposed to be an amelioration, but I draw the attention of the House to the exchange on Tuesday between the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd). The Secretary of State said:

"Revaluation has taken place for decades in respect of rates on domestic and business premises. It is never possible to predict the results of revaluation before the revaluation takes place. There is nothing new about having a non-domestic rate revaluation."—[*Official Report*, 19 April 1988; Vol. 131, c. 779]

[Mr. Richard Livsey]

The last revaluation was in 1973, more than a decade ago. If there is to be only a five-year transitional period, considerable concessions will be needed. I trust that the Secretary of State will make those concessions tonight.

Another worrying aspect relates to shops and post offices, with the people who run those businesses living in the same premises. They will be subject to the uniform business rate as well as to the poll tax. That will hit the traditional family business. The combination of the revaluation and the uniform business rate will cause very great problems for small businesses. The Secretary of State for Wales wrote to me on 14 April about the problems in my constituency and he was honest enough to say:

"The effect on individual businesses is difficult to predict."

I do not believe that anybody can predict precisely what will happen. Within defined areas there may be grave differences between individual businesses and there will be many anomalies that cannot be corrected.

We object to the removal of local accountability. These provisions mean that local authorities will have no power over a large proportion of their revenue, the tax will not be highly visible, and the link between those who pay and those who spend the money will be very weak.

I shall deal now with amendments Nos. 9 and 10 in relation to charities. Many charities could face large increases in their rate bills from the introduction of the national non-domestic rate, largely due to the effects of revaluation on high street shops. Amendment No. 9 seeks to mitigate these effects by increasing the present 50 per cent. rate reduction to a 90 per cent. reduction. In addition, the existing system of non-domestic rating gives local authorities the power to waive the 50 per cent. liability that charities face. The Bill as presently drafted does not make this provision. Amendment No. 10 restores the situation.

5.30 pm

This is a very worrying state of affairs for charities. There are a tremendous number of charities in this country. Representations that we have received from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations stresses these points. At present, with rate relief of 50 per cent. under section 40(1) of the General Rate Act 1967, this totalled £81·7 million in 1985-86. Discretionary rate relief from the rating authority of the remaining 50 per cent., under the same Act, is also available to charitable organisations and various other non-profit making organisations. This totalled £20·4 million in 1985-86.

These large sums of money affect many worthwhile charities. In the places where they operate, the properties they occupy, those include the offices of national and local charities and voluntary organisations, as well as charity shops. I am sure that such shops can be found in the constituences of many hon. Members. Properties include village and parish halls, community centres, day centres, sports clubs and leisure centres, as well as training workshops.

It is very difficult to estimate the total number of properties involved, but there are 158,000 registered charities in Great Britain and at least a further 100,000 non-registered charities. The implications of the measure are very great for charitable organisations. I hope that the Secretary of State and the Minister will pay due attention to these matters. For these reasons we wish to support the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and myself as well as amendment No. 7 and new clause 6.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I wish to follow the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi). I thank him for his kind remarks about my previous career as a champion of small businesses.

The whole point about rates, as I understand it, is to protect businesses from the depredations of spendthrift councils. We must be very careful with our new proposals and ensure that the increases do not turn out to be depredations. Surely it must be the intention of the Secretary of State to protect small businesses.

I was very pleased to see the Secretary of State's latest press release dated 20 April. He tells us that he has taken on board many of the concerns voiced about this rate, and that he will be phasing it in. He has not yet told us, however, how long that phasing-in process will be. I hope that he will not find it necessary to increase the rates of any business by more than 10 per cent. a year. If he does so, it may present special difficulties to small firms.

I shall give an example of one small business in my constituency. The potential increase in the rateable value can be worked out by reference to rent increases since 1973, when the last valuation took place. It is likely to be somewhere between £2,000 and £6,500, which is an enormous amount of extra money to have to find. Even if that increase were phased in at 10 per cent. a year, such a business would need to find something like £400 every year to meet that increase. I do not think that that is an exceptional example. The point is that in relation to that business, and that family, living from the proceeds from the business, it can be a very large sum indeed.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) is absolutely right, as this assumes, even with a phasing-in period, that that business is able to generate more income to meet the increase. For example, rural village post offices, as in my constituency, tend to be flat on income or even squeezed out. No matter how long one spins out an enormous increase, such increases will still have to be found in the end.

Mrs. Gorman: The hon. Gentleman's point is very valid.

Mr. Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Gorman: I shall give way in a moment.

This increase, as the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) has pointed out, will not be just 10 per cent. in a year, but 10 per cent. every year, plus inflation, in the foreseeable future, and certainly for 10 years. To make the extra profit to meet that increase, that business will at best need to turn over perhaps £4,000 to £5,000 a year more, to give it a net profit of 10 per cent. or £400. In many trades, particularly groceries, there may be a much lower profit margin, so that business may have to generate £8,000 to £10,000 a year more trade. That is very difficult to do year on year.

A small shoe shop or book shop in the town cannot necessarily expect to get that amount of extra custom. Perhaps a greengrocer is in competition with three or four more grocers in the high street. These little businesses, such as a small cafe or a little wool shop, cannot automatically

generate that amount of extra trade. Small retailers in particular, perhaps trading in competition with a little bit of black economy, or with the multiples, which can spread costs over a much larger turnover, may well be in special difficulty.

I know that it is not the intention of the Secretary of State to be callous or insensitive to the needs of small businesses. Some people might say, "Well, these businesses have had it good for a long time because the rateable revaluation should have taken place long ago." But that is no help if one has suddenly to dig into one's pocket and find this extra amount of money in a short time.

Mr. Patnick: We are working on several assumptions. One is that the rating and valuation court will disappear and that people will be unable to appeal if they believe the rating is incorrect. The second is that there have been no rating increases or revaluations since 1973, which is not the case. Rating revaluation continues to take place. It is possible to appeal and, indeed, to obtain a revaluation.

Mrs. Gorman: My hon. Friend must know something that I do not and I need to have it checked, but I do not think that he has his facts quite right.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Gorman: In a moment; let me finish my point.

My point is that the increase must be met out of an income that cannot necessarily be increased very much. Some people might say, "Tough luck, you have had it good, so that is your hard luck," and others might say, "This is the market operating, and therefore market forces should rule."

I give way to nobody in the House in my support of market forces, but of course, paying one's rates is not a question of dealing with ordinary competitive market forces. A business man cannot choose whom he pays to cart away his dustbin or mend the holes in the road. He has to do that through a monopolised system known as the local council. He is not really in a position to influence his expenditure on many things for which he must pay the council.

I hope to live to see the day when everybody pays directly for everything, including education, but that has to come in future Conservative Governments.

What are we going to do to help those small firms? My amendment proposes a safety net. It makes proposals for small firms with a taxable profit of less than £20,000. I appreciate that that will vary, but that amount of money represents the pre-tax profit of the company and is the income of the family concerned. Out of that money they will have to pay the rate increase. Therefore, we are talking about a lowering of their income levels by increasing the rates on their small business. I am proposing that people in that position, producing their accounts to the rating officer, may apply for an abatement. The actual amount would have to be decided, probably by the Secretary of State.

There is a precedent for that sort of system. I have a form that is produced by Macclesfield borough council. It allows people to apply for rate and rent rebates in that area. One of the questions on the form relates to small businesses and self-employed people, who can produce their audited accounts and apply for a rate rebate.

The alternative to us taking on board the plight that small businesses will experience is seeing another exodus of small shops and retailers from our high streets and not so high streets and the banks, buildings societies and estate agents will move in. As I have said, I support market forces. If and when a business goes, new people will know what the rates are and will take on the premises knowing what they are in for. In the meantime, I am sure that we do not want to see yet more empty shops where the rates exceed the rent, which is why they are standing empty. I am sure that we want to avoid that and the way to do it is to phase in the increase which, as I have said, no business could possibly have anticipated. We do not know exactly what the increase will be but we know that in some cases it will be a devastating amount.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I come from a rural area with a scattered population and most of the businesses in my area are small. The question of the impact of the new regime on such businesses is causing considerable concern. The reports that we had earlier this week and the figures that have been quoted on the possible effect on small businesses have led to many of those small concerns starting to express misgivings about the direction in which we are moving.

The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) asked whether we should be gearing the revenue from business rates on the basis of property values. I agree wholeheartedly that it should be on the basis of profitability. Indeed, there is an analogy between the impact on businesses and the impact on individuals. We have had arguments and debates at earlier stages of the Bill on the need for a progressive system for individuals, with those with the greatest ability to pay paying a little more while those with less ability to pay would pay less. I believe that that argument is equally applicable to the business sector.

That causes difficulty with some of the amendments in this group. The system that the Government have suggested can be unfair and burdensome for some large companies as well as smaller companies. Indeed, new clause 6, which I shall support as a step in the right direction, gears itself to smaller companies alone.

5.45 pm

In the evidence we gave to the Layfield committee 10 years ago, we suggested that there should be something that we called an incorporation tax. I suspect that that was probably the wrong title. The details of what we were suggesting were that there should be a system of taxation for the corporate sector, for small and large businesses, that was geared to ability to pay and profitability. There could be a threshold level analogous to the threshold that exists for individuals in that there is a threshold that one has to reach before taxation is paid. It should recognise the difficulties of small companies or companies close to the breadline and the contribution to the local exchequer should be in line with profitability.

I accept that there are difficulties in concept to some extent when one is dealing with multi-plant concerns. There is the question how one allocates profitability that may be computed only on a central basis. In passing, there is a strong argument for having profitability computed on a plant basis so that employees identify themselves with the success of their company, measured by the profitability on a plant level. Even if that was not part of company law,

[Mr. Dafydd Wigley]

on a conceptual basis it would be possible to apportion profitability on the basis of turnover, employees or whatever. Certainly, that would be a better basis than working purely on property value.

The basis of property value is even less fair for businesses than it is for individuals. There are all sorts of anomalies and I recognise the need to move away from a purely property-based revenue system for local government. I have said that before and hon. Members know that my party would like to see a local income tax. However, at least with individuals there is some indication of wealth in terms of the property they hold. That can be totally different for businesses. The land and buildings they take up may be totally out of proportion to the turnover that exists within the framework.

In this legislation, we have landed ourselves with proposals that are not radical enough. We shall wait many years before there are changes to this and it is a shame that we have not taken the opportunity to find a system for local government that is more acceptable.

I am not sure whether the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) goes far enough. The formula it suggests is restrictive. I find the formula suggested by the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) more attractive as a way of trying to alleviate some of the pressures. However, again one is drawing an arbitrary line and it has the problems associated with drawing arbitrary lines anywhere.

We have a formula within the Bill as it stands that is unsatisfactory and which will cause considerable difficulty. It will cause difficulties for many of the friends of Conservative Members who, for reasons that I would not think of as being valid, have looked to the Conservative party from time to time for protection. I suspect that Conservative Members will face quite a reaction when the truth comes home.

There is also the question of the effect that it will have on regional regeneration. That has been referred to by hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber. For my sins, I am one of the vice-presidents of the Federation of Industrial Development Associations. I know that this is causing concern to those industrial development associations. They are worried about the additional factor that may be a disincentive. One has to handle that with considerable sensitivity and I am not convinced that that has been thought through in the legislation.

I apologise to the House for the fact that there is not an amendment in my name that would bring about a solution to the problems I have mentioned. The amendments that I would like to have tabled, along with others that I tried to table in Committee, were outside the purview of the Bill. An incorporation tax, like value added tax and so on, is outside the definition of what we are allowed to do. However, we should be looking at amendments in those radical terms.

If we do not receive a concession from the Government when the Secretary of State replies, or if the amendments are not carried, we must look to another place to bring forward its amendments to make sure that the imposition we are placing on all businesses, particularly small businesses, is something that they can carry. We must ensure that we do not do ourselves economic damage in bringing about a change that is needed but which, at the moment, does not appear to be on the even basis that hon. Members on both sides of the House would wish to see.

Mr. Ridley: It might be for the convenience of the House if I intervened now that the amendments have all been moved and spoken to, so that I can make clear the Government's position on these matters, and, if the House gives me leave, reply to any detailed points as briefly as possible at the end. This is a very important matter and I would like to give the House the benefit of my thinking as fully as possible in order to give such reassurance as I can about the Government's intentions.

Only two of the amendments and new clauses explicitly concern the transitional arrangements; the rest are really concerned with a permanent cushion of the effect of rates as a tax on small businesses, however defined.

I share the view that both large and small businesses will need time to adjust to the change in values that will emerge from the revaluation, and we accept that that need is greater for small businesses than for bigger ones. I will come to the details of our proposals later. I discussed them yesterday, as hon. Members have said, with the leaders of the main business organisations. We agreed that there should be gentle transitional arrangements and that businesses would be consulted on the precise details of how those arrangements would be worked out before we came to a conclusion. We further agreed on the need to retain a duty on local authorities to consult business representatives about their spending plans.

The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) quoted the Confederation of British Industry and reinforced the point as his own view that the link between businesses and local authorities was very important. I agree, but it is almost non-existent in terms of any statutory connection at the moment. First, there are no votes for businesses representing the rates that they pay to local authorities. Secondly, there is no benefit to a local authority that is successful in enticing industry into its area.

It may not be generally realised, but when, say, the rateable value of an authority increases by £1 million owing to industrial settlement in its area, the rate support grant is currently cut by an equivalent amount, removing all benefit from the successful. And I am afraid that the converse is true—that a spendthrift authority that loses £1 million of industrial rating through driving businesses out gets compensated by having its grant increased by a similar amount. So the link does not exist.

Dr. Cunningham: The Secretary of State has just said again that the link does not exist. There is at the moment a statutory requirement upon local authorities to consult, and it is placed on them by the Government. Is he saying that even Conservative-controlled councils are not taking any notice of that requirement?

Mr. Ridley: That is an unnecessary intervention, because I have already said that we agreed to retain the statutory link to consult. That is quite different from a responsibility under some financial arrangement.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ridley: No, I must get on; I have a lot to say. I may cover the hon. Gentleman's points; I nearly always do.

I want to say something quite important about this, because we have an improvement. The point that was raised was whether the new system would contain any incentive for local authorities to provide businesses with the services that they need. We realised that most of those services to businesses are not revenue services but capital services, such as infrastructure, roads, improvement of the environment and many other such things.

So we agreed that we would use the new capital control system, of which I expect to announce details soon, to make it possible to take account of the need to provide new infrastructure to encourage business expansion. That, of course, could be a very major part of the new statutory consultative arrangements that we propose. I believe that that package of statutory consultation arrangements, together with the use of capital allocations directed to the true needs of industry, could form a much better package than we have at present. I hope that the House feels that that would be an improvement.

All the amendments are concerned with special treatment for small businesses. My hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) moved amendment No. 7, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Sir B. Rhys Williams). We all miss my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington very much. He made a great contribution to the debates in Committee and, although he did not always entirely support the Government's arguments and propositions, I pay a tribute to the thoughtfulness and wisdom that he brought to our debates. I think that the whole House would have wished him to be with us during the past week and hopes that he will be back with us soon.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ridley: Could I complete the argument? I will stop after a bit and have a question time, but I may be going to cover the hon. Gentleman's point. I do not want not to give way; it is just that I want to put a list of serious arguments before the House.

Amendment No. 7 would abate the first £1,000 of rates due on a hereditament by 50 per cent. Amendment No. 155 and new clause 6 in the Opposition's name would do the same—only, unusually for the Opposition, they would leave to my sole discretion the rates of abatement. I am always glad of the competence which hon. Gentlemen sometimes try to thrust upon me and sometimes criticise me for trying to take to myself, but that is another matter.

In other words, amendment No. 7 would mean that everyone would pay £500 less, except that someone would have to pay more to make up for this. The amendment would cost between £0·8 billion and £0·9 billion. That is an estimate; it is not easy to be clear about this. It is clear from the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, South-East that he intends that the rest of business should pay for that.

When I asked the hon. Member for Copeland about this, he said that in his view the cost should be shared between the national taxpayer and other businesses but as he might go up to 100 per cent. relief it seems to me that the general sense of these two amendments is that 50 per cent. relief would be the responsibility of the rest of industry. That would put another 10 per cent. on to the bills of the rest of business and industry, or roughly that.

The main fault in that is that it does not discriminate fairly between the small businesses that will face large increases, those that will end up all square and those that will be the major gainers from the national non-domestic rate. Even those who gained from the introduction and the revaluation would share that exemption. What it amounts to is the permanent subsidising of smaller businesses by larger businesses, and it has nothing to do with transition. That, I believe, would undermine the whole point of a property tax, in that payment would cease to be based on the true value of the property. The amendments introduce a new and permanent distortion—precisely when we are getting rid of so much that is already distorting in the system.

The hon. Member for Copeland insisted that, if we have a capital taxation system, the valuation should be accurate. He quite rightly admitted—I am glad that he did—that he would want to have a business revaluation himself. But if one is having a business revaluation and basing a tax on values, one has to take the values which the valuer reaches, and not change them, as a permanent feature of the tax. It would not make a sensible cushion for the position that small businesses will face in 1990. It is unnecessary to do it that way because the Government are proposing what is already a transitional scheme, which I will come to shortly. So it is not a transitional measure but a permanent weighting of the system.

6 pm

Amendments Nos. 228 and 270 in the names of my hon. Friends the Members for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) and Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) share the same defect. They would provide for a reduced rate bill for any business which is not a public limited company and which makes a taxable profit of less than £20,000 a year or has a turnover of less than £100,000 a year. Again, the amendments would give me a remarkably wide power—not that I complain about that. The amount of abatement would be as much or as little as I liked; at least, that is how I read the amendments. Again they come up against the objection that they design a permanent solution for a temporary problem.

I shall return to the best way to define small firms. We now have three values—the rateable value, the turnover and the profit. The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) added VAT and one or two others, so there are masses of values. I will return to that point, but I think that I should pursue the argument logically in a different way.

There is some evidence that small businesses pay more in rates per square foot than large ones. I agree about that, but I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, South-East that I do not think that is because of the zoning system of valuation. The zoning system of valuation is merely a method of comparing one property with another. The actual value is determined ultimately on an appeal to the valuation court. The truth probably is that small premises are more valuable per square foot than larger premises or premises which go further back from the main street. This is simply a technique for measuring that.

I am not entirely clear how values vary, but it seems that rents per square foot are higher for small units in a free market than for large units. That in turn no doubt reflects the judgment of the market that small units are worth more than are large units, presumably because they are in shorter supply relative to demand. Demand in turn reflects business men's judgment of the profit which they

[Mr. Ridley]

are likely to make from one type of premises rather than another. So rates have a clear, if indirect, relationship with profits.

Moreover, if we give a permanent subsidy to small businesses or the buildings they occupy, that might serve only to increase demand for small units, thus benefiting no one but the landlords of those units, and not the businesses occupying them. It is possible that a general reduction in the rateable value of small shops would be a boon to the landlords but not to the business men.

This argument can be carried forward into the whole question of the transitional relief and is of great importance. The effect of low rates on property values in many parts of the south of England is that rents have been more buoyant. In fact, landlords have been the beneficiaries as tenants have been willing to pay more rent because they were paying lower rates. After revaluation, landlords will find that the combined rent and rates bills which their tenants have to pay may be above the market value and that in due course they will have no alternative but to reduce the rents. That in turn will cause the rates to follow rents down at the next revaluation.

Mr. Richard Shepherd *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: If my hon. Friend lets me complete the point, I shall give way in a moment. I am making an important point which I want all Members to grasp.

I will repeat it. Rents are high in prime sites. They will attract high rates on revaluation, but the combined effect will mean that the high rent cannot be sustained. It will come down and at the next revaluation the rates will fall alongside the rent. That is why the transitional arrangements are needed to cushion the effect. That position may not persist, as is perceived now, because of the very effect about which I have told the House.

Mr. Shepherd: Sometimes my right hon. Friend does not acknowledge that some of us are intelligent enough to grasp the proposals which he is making. Most of us who rent property are locked into leases with fixed periods for rent reviews. Modern leases invariably state that there will be no reduction in the rent under any circumstances. We shall come to the transitional arrangements into which my right hon. Friend is leading us but I want him in this terrible, disastrous, dangerous, nasty, miserable, economic measure to have regard to that.

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend is right. But if the two parties to an agreement wish to change it, they are at liberty to do so. It cannot be changed unilaterally, but it can be changed if both sides to the agreement wish to do so. I think we will find that some of them will.

Mr. John Heddle (Mid-Staffordshire): What my right hon. Friend has said is right. There is a direct correlation between rent and rates total outgoings. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the transitional arrangements should be for a longer rather than a shorter period to enable the normal five, seven, 14 or 21-year lease, to which my hon. Friend for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) rightly referred, to balance out on the gross and net outgoings of industrial and commercial enterprises?

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend has made the point which I was about to make. The consequences of what I have said, with which he agrees, are that although one form of transition may be appropriate for the first quinquennium, a different form of transitional scheme might be appropriate after that. Of course, by the time we get to the second revaluation in 1995, perhaps none, perhaps some or perhaps a lot of what I am predicting will have happened. Therefore, we may find that those who thought they would be big losers have turned out at the second revaluation not to be in that position. That is the only point I seek to make.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): This is not necessarily an unfriendly question. We have done our best to follow this. Does it not involve the most enormous potential use of valuers and assessors? Has the Department of the Environment made any estimate of the skilled actuarial and other manpower that will be necessary?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman said that he had done his best to follow the argument; clearly it was not good enough. A revaluation is to be carried out by the Inland Revenue, not by my Department, in 1990, with a further one in 1995. Nothing that I have said adds to or subtracts from the effort involved in that.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: As I understand it, the Secretary of State is saying that if rates rise considerably over time, that will force rents down, and that will sort out the problem. Yet he is introducing a uniform business rate on the grounds that execessive rates increases in certain local authority areas are hitting business badly. I cannot understand how he can argue one point about what happens now and a completely different and opposite point about what will happen in future under his proposals.

Mr. Ridley: Even if I predict wrongly, there is no harm in making allowance for the possibility that I may be right. The effect that I have described has to be taken into account.

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware of how important certainty in prediction is for small business? I would welcome the opportunity to support him in every way except that, as a small shopkeeper, I am aware of the importance of what my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) said, that once one is locked into an agreement, perhaps with a London property company, the rent will not be reduced however rates may change.

I fear that unless something is done to allow small shopkeepers to predict with reasonable certainty—as they can at present—approximate increases in rates, the Government may well succeed in their aim of assisting business back into the inner cities, but it will only be attracted to the bigger parts. Businesses will be driven away from smaller places and, as the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) said, the smaller areas will lose out to the larger. The multinationals will not be hurt, but the smaller areas will be crucified.

Mr. Ridley: I am fully aware of that: I have not yet come to the proposals that I shall put forward. I ask hon. Members to bear in mind that if there is something in my argument—my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) thinks there is—we should at least allow for it to take place.

Amendment No. 171 would extend the duration of the transitional arrangements from five years to 10, but I believe it would be better to take power to provide for a further and possibly different transitional scheme to cover the five years after 1995. That will take account of any changes that are apparent in 1995 and any increases that may still be to come through by 1990. It will enable us to set a lower transitional ceiling in the first five years than would otherwise have been possible. So we are at one with the principle of the amendment but we shall put it in a different form later on.

Amendment No. 171, which would simply extend the 1990 transitional arrangements, is too inflexible and would mean that we would be forced to continue setting a ceiling for businesses still facing increases from 1990, even if they had gained from the 1995 revaluation. If there are still significant changes to come through, if is far more sensible to have a fresh transitional scheme, such as we propose, to benefit those that might most need it at the time.

Mr. Douglas: I understand that the uniform business rate is intended to apply to the whole of Britain. What are the implications for Scotland of what the right hon. Gentleman has said? We have already had a revaluation. What sort of amendment is likely to be made in another place to the Scottish legislation?

Mr. Ridley: I am not to answer for any special provisions that relate to Scotland. The idea is that the rateable value bases of the two countries should be brought entirely in line as soon as possible so that there is no distortion between arrangements in England and Scotland.

We do not yet have reliable figures or detailed estimates of the effects of the revaluation, and it is possible that once we have them we might need to think again about whether it is practical to finance the whole cost of the ceiling by a cap on gains, or by having also a small premium on poundage. We want to keep both powers in the Bill, but we shall take powers by means of amendments in another place to phase gains as well as losses.

Dr. Hampson: My right hon. Friend says that he would take account of the fact that any phasing in in one part of the country of a redistributive system may have effects elsewhere—for example, in the north. We have been promised that this will draw in much new business, and many of us do not want the system to be phased in to the point at which that extra incentive is eroded.

6.15 pm

Mr. Ridley: I accept my hon. Friend's point. It is important that we should weigh the advantages of the gainers—especially in the north—against whatever transitional relief we give to possible losers in the south.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is a more hazardous enterprise to combine a revaluation with a change in poundage to a national average poundage? Does he not concede that it might be better to take the necessary powers to cancel the 1990 revaluation and to move to a system in which rates are revalued when rents are revised, or when leases are changed or freeholds change hands? There could, of course, be a long-stop power to say that if a freehold or lease did not change for seven or 10 years, there would be a revaluation. The argument that my right hon. Friend tried to put to the House earlier—it did not meet with universal approval—about how rates and rents might adjust to each other would then have some force, because a revaluation would take place only when rents changed.

Mr. Ridley: I think that my hon. Friend is inviting us not to proceed with the revaluation; that would be a disaster. All the problems that we are discussing today have resulted from postponing the revaluation for 17 years. It is better to bring valuations uniformly and universally up to their true value so that we start to get back to a property tax that is based on property values.

One of the worries that underlies and obscures much of the discussion on this subject is the premise that a great majority of small businesses, or businesses as a whole, will face large increases in rates as a result of all this. The burden on business will remain exactly the same as it is now. Indeed, in future it will not rise in real terms, which is much better than if the present rating system had been allowed to continue. Naturally, there will be losers and gainers, but relatively few businesses will face large rate increases.

Revaluation arouses more fear than the NNDR, because it is a fear of the unknown. The businesses that face increases will tend to be concentrated in retailing, in prime high street sites, and in the south of the country. In other words, they will be those that have been most successful since the last revaluation 15 years ago, but the figures that are being bandied about apply to only a tiny fraction even of them. The National Federation of Self-Employed and Small Businesses likes to talk as if every small shop will face increases of hundreds of per cent., but that is not true. If they did, there would not be much left for the rest of business to pay.

There was some interesting news on this only yesterday. The NFSESB has been encouraging its members to forecast changes in rate bills by looking at their present rental values and assuming that the new poundage in 1990 will be 50p in the pound. Yet a firm of chartered surveyors —Messrs Herring, Son and Daw—came out with the forecast that the total of all rateable values will increase by a factor more like 7 than 5, and that as a result the new poundage is likely to be of the order of 35p—one seventh of what it is now. If that is true—I stress that it is too soon to say anything about this precisely—the small businesses that have been forecasting their rate bills by the NFSESB method and have come up with some pretty horrid results will find themselves paying 30 per cent. less than they had been led to expect.

Nevertheless, for the few that will face big increases in 1990, we are providing unprecedented transitional arrangements. There will be arrangements in Scotland similar to those in England and Wales, although the details may differ to suit the circumstances. We have already announced that these arrangements take the form of a ceiling on year-on-year rate increases for five years after 1990. As I have already said, we propose to take powers to allow further transitional arrangements for the period after 1995. That will enable us to leave the effect of the largest increases to be dealt with after a substantial revaluation when the rent-rate equation may be better balanced. The largest increases may never happen at all.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): Why are there to be transitional arrangements in Scotland after 1990 when there is not to be a uniform business rate in Scotland after 1990?

Mr. Ridley: Scotland will move to unified business rate at the English rate poundage after rateable values have been harmonised. No changes to the Bill are proposed, because it is unclear how fast harmonisation can proceed. That is the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question.

We have already announced that, recognising, as I have said, the specific difficulties of those small businesses that will face large rates increases, we agreed in Committee to look closely at the possibility of a special transitional arrangement scheme for small businesses. I am now able to tell the House that we shall take power to have such a scheme and that it will take the form of a lower ceiling on year-on-year increases for small businesses than for larger businesses.

Amendments to provide such a power will be introduced in another place. We shall take a final decision whether to activate the power at the same time that we take a decision on the overall ceiling later this year, when we have more information on the outcome of revaluation. That clearly makes sense. The need for a specially reduced ceiling for small businesses will be less if we find that we can afford a relatively generous ceiling for all businesses.

Mr. John Watts (Slough): I understand that it is not possible to predict the effects of revaluation until the exercise has been completed, but I do not understand why my right hon. Friend argues that he cannot announce what the maximum ceiling on rate increases should be until the outcome of revaluation is known. As I understand it, we wish to allow such a ceiling in order to ensure that the proposals do not impose intolerable increases in rate burdens on business, such as we are trying to stop by linking increases in the uniform poundage to the rate of inflation in future years. Why cannot my right hon. Friend give some reassurance to the many businesses which are concerned about the impact of the proposals by at least saying that the ceiling will be no lower than whatever percentage he might consider appropriate?

Mr. Ridley: The lower the ceiling that is imposed, the higher the cap that will be imposed on the gainers and the other half of business and industry, as exemplified by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson), who is keen to make sure that whatever the transitional arrangements, they are fair as between the losers and the gainers.

Secondly, I could make an awful mess of this—[HON. MEMBERS: "You have."]—by announcing a ceiling of 20 per cent., 15 per cent. or 10 per cent. now, which could turn out to be unnecessarily high or unnecessarily low depending on whether one is a gainer or a loser.

When we discussed this yesterday with the CBI, the Institute of Directors and the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, they were keen on the conclusion to which we all came that there should be no determination of the ceiling at this stage because they did not know the figures that would emerge from the revaluation and they would very much prefer to know those figures before they calculate what attitude to take to the level of the annual ceiling. I am sure that my hon. Friend would not like me to go against the advice given by those major business organisations yesterday. It would be better to wait until we have the revaluation. *[Interruption.]* Yes, and the view of small businesses too.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): I am sure that my right hon. Friend remembers that he was kind enough to receive a delegation of the main business groups representing small firms on 8 February which asked for a spreading of the transitional period and a special ceiling for the smaller firms. My right hon. Friend may be attacked fairly widely because any new tax is bound to be imposed, but the House should recognise that he has given the main small business groups the two pledges that they asked for on 8 February. At least we should be grateful for that. The ceiling should give them the security of knowing that they should not be put out of business. We at least know that there will be a ceiling, even if we do not know the details of it at the moment.

Mr. Ridley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I have already said that we shall have two ceilings—one for the larger businesses and one for the smaller businesses. Of course, it is important that the small and large business organisations should be consulted about what those ceilings should be, but all of them are of the opinion that they would prefer to know the rate rises they face before they decide on their attitude to any particular provision.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: Does not my right hon. Friend's exposition really underline that this is a most speculative redistributive tax? We do not have a clue how it will hurt or help people. My right hon. Friend cannot give that information for his constituency, for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's constituency or for my constituency. We do not have a clue. Would it not be better to withdraw this part of the Bill so that we can look at revaluation and see how a major business tax affects the community?

Mr. Ridley: If my hon. Friend had his way and we withdrew this part of the Bill, we would have a revaluation of non-domestic assets with no hope of a transitional scheme of any sort whatever. His problem would be infinitely more difficult, because that is the only alternative. Without this part of the Bill, there would be no powers for a transitional scheme.

Mr. Butterfill: I do not wish to prevent my right hon. Friend from getting on and telling us how he will define small businesses, but when the matter was raised in Committee—my right hon. Friend will remember that I moved an amendment on this—he did say that he thought that the differential between small and large businesses should be in the region of 5 per cent. Can he confirm that that is still the sort of differential that is in his mind?

Mr. Ridley: It is indeed. That might be the right figure. *[Laughter.]* Labour Members should not be too stupid. I am asked to consult and listen to the views of business. Is it not better to say that I am not sure whether that is the figure that I shall choose if the object of the exercise is to consult and listen to people? I have never heard such stupidity from Labour Members who ask me to listen to what people are saying and at the same time castigate me for having a closed mind.

Dr. Cunningham *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: No, I shall not give way.

Dr. Cunningham *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: All right, but the hon. Gentleman does not deserve it.

Dr. Cunningham: No matter how ungraciously the Secretary of State has given way, I am grateful to him. The laughter, which was at least as loud from Conservative Members as from Labour Members, was because the right hon. Gentleman is asking the House to vote on this matter tonight, yet he cannot even tell us what we are voting about.

Mr. Ridley: The Government have no amendments.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): My right hon. Friend will recall that towards the end of last year and earlier this year he and his hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Local Government assured us that business in the north of England in my part of the world would benefit greatly from the unified business rate. We welcomed that fact. There is now some concern that the £700 million gain that we in the north hoped to get will not now materialise. Can he assure us before he finishes speaking this evening that that is what will happen and that the gains in the north, that are so desperately needed in manufacturing industry, will be there?

Mr. Ridley: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. We are talking about the rate at which the resource transfer will take place. Many of my hon. Friends are suggesting that the rate at which that resource transfer should take place should be slowed down. I am making the point that I do not want to slow it down more than can be helped because I must take account of the points made by my hon. Friend and by other of my hon. Friends whose constituents may be among the losers.

Let me return to the distinction between a large and small firm, with which my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) asked me to deal. The problem with the definition couched in the terms of new clause 6, which is by reference to the structure, taxable profits, asset base and number of employees in the company, is that it would impose a considerable amount of extra work on local authorities because it would require the collection of large amounts of information that they do not at present have or have any need for.

They would also need to be able to verify it. It seems much more practical to make the qualifying test the rateable value of the property. That would give greater certainty and allow the concession to be applied automatically by local authorities and so ensure that all those entitled to benefit would do so.

We should like to set a threshold for relief by reference to the new valuation lists rather than the existing ones, but we shall have to wait a little longer to decide what is appropriate in the light of that revaluation. It would be almost impossible to base the arrangements on profits or turnover, which are sometimes not determined until two or three years after the event. It would be a most complex business to have to go back to past years to give businesses refunds or impose surcharges depending on eventual profits and it would also greatly affect the cash flow of local authorities.

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): Why should it be so difficult to have a local turnover tax? For years after the war most European economies had precisely that—before they moved to value added tax. Such a tax can be estimated on an annual basis.

6.30 pm

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman will be in trouble with his Front Bench colleagues, who think that they would like to retain a capital tax for businesses as well as individuals to provide local revenue. I do not think we should be diverted into inventing a new tax at this point in my speech.

I understand businesses' concern to know what their rate bills will be in 1990, but we simply cannot set a ceiling until we have the preliminary results of the revaluation, nor can we make a final decision on the need for special protection for small businesses or on how to administer it. However, we shall do that as soon as we can in the autumn.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): Given the number of imponderables that seem to have been introduced and the decisions that cannot be taken until the autumn, will my right hon. Friend assure the House—for the benefit of those of us who still have mild doubts—that the proposals will be laid before the House in the autumn in the form of regulations and that we shall have the opportunity to vote upon them then?

Mr. Ridley: Absolutely. I do not know precisely when regulations will be laid, but the Bill would give the powers to make regulations that would then be consulted upon and laid before the House, and that would be the time at which to decide these matters. Notwithstanding our eagerness to make the decisions, I am sure that the House will agree that we would be wiser to make them on the basis of facts rather than speculation.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Is not the problem that whereas amendments and new clauses can be amended by the House, regulations cannot? Moreover, does my right hon. Friend intend that the affirmative or the negative resolution procedure should apply? If the negative resolution procedure applies, we may not even get a debate on the regulations. If the affirmative resolution procedure applies and we disagreed with and defeated the regulations, there would be no relief, so we should have to accept them faute de mieux.

Mr. Ridley: The resolution should be an affirmative one. I am certain about that, but we have not even tabled the amendments necessary to bring this about.

My hon. Friend's observations must apply to all regulations, but if there were no regulation-making power, there would be no chance to change what might have been on the face of the Bill. Had I put the scheme in the Bill, it would have been just as unamendable when enacted as an order-making power, but an order-making power can be used to amend an order.

The hon. Members for Copeland and for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) asked about relief for charitable bodies. The history of this matter is well known. We accept that it is entirely right that charities should not have to pay the full rates and that in the case of other bodies performing activities which it is in the public interest to encourage to flourish—education, sport, recreation and culture—the possibility of giving relief from rates should be available. The provisions are contained in section 40 of the General Rate Act 1967 and have been developed over many years; they command widespread public support

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and generally seem to work well. Our policy is to replicate the existing provisions as closely as the change to the new system permits.

Clause 39(5) and (6) already contain provisions whereby charities will have their rate bills automatically rebated by 50 per cent. That is what the factor 2 does in the bottom line of the formula. The provisions that we intend to reintroduce will permit charging authorities to increase that rebate up to 100 per cent. and additionally to give relief of up to 100 per cent. at their discretion to other bodies—in the words of the 1967 Act, relief may be granted to bodies that are

"philanthropic, religious, concerned with education, social welfare, science, literature or the fine arts"

and to premises used for the purposes thereof, subject in all cases to the requirement that the body concerned must not be conducted for profit.

We intend to ensure that the full cost of giving relief for charities and for other non-profit-making bodies does not fall on the community charge payers. For mandatory relief, the position is simple: local authorities will be obliged to give this relief, so it will be deducted in calculating their contributions to the national non-domestic rate pool.

For discretionary relief, it is a little more complicated. At present, the whole cost of any discretionary relief that a local authority gives is borne locally, but that cost is spread across local business as well as domestic ratepayers. If we did nothing more, the entire cost would fall on local community charge payers under the new system. That might make authorities less keen to give relief than at present and it would not be as fair as the present system. That is certainly not what we want. We therefore propose that authorities should be allowed to offset half the cost of any relief that they give against their payments into the national non-domestic rate pool. Regulations under schedule 7(4) will deal with that.

The new arrangements will roughly mirror the present arrangements, as just under half the total rate bill, and thus half the cost of relief given now comes from domestic ratepayers. I hope that that is adequate to satisfy the two hon. Gentlemen.

Dr. Cunningham: The Secretary of State has made an important and, on the whole, welcome statement, although we shall have to look very carefully, as always, at the fine print. I welcome at least the commitment in principle to make the change and I am sure that it will also be widely welcomed outside the House. From what I can recollect of the details that he has given, he seems to have met the points in full, and I am grateful to him.

Mr. Ridley: I am not aware that there are any differences between us, but I do not want to claim that until the hon. Gentleman and I are both sure that it is true.

Mr. Livsey: I thank the Secretary of State for his concession. If I heard what he said correctly, he is giving 100 per cent. relief to charities. The difference remains between this 100 per cent. and a residual 25 per cent., and the Secretary of State mentioned that there was a differential. As I understand it, there is 25 per cent. left. Where will that burden fall? Will it fall on the local authority and will it be 25 per cent. more than it is liable for at present?

Mr. Ridley: Setting aside mandatory relief, local authorities at present shoulder about a quarter of the cost of discretionary relief. We suggest that they should continue to do so, although the cost will of course be transferred from ratepayers to community charge payers. Effectively, that leaves the discretion with local authorities, while the financial consequences will remain almost identical.

Mr. Douglas: The Secretary of State has said something very profound about the amelioration of the rate burden. The Scottish arrangements, particularly in relation to sports grounds, are very different from those in England. We are supposed to be seeking harmonisation. What consultation has the Secretary of State had with his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland to ensure that we get the same advantages for sports grounds and other recreational facilities in Scotland as he seems to be giving in England and Wales?

Mr. Ridley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and I talk about little else, and we talk about it frequently. I am most concerned that the arrangements for Scotland, and the basis of valuation, should be identical to those in England, so that there is no distortion of competition and so that there is fairness.

Mr. Butterfill: On this question of parity between Scotland and England, my right hon. Friend will recall that certain groups of people, especially those in the mining and extraction industries or others who need to use the contractor test, are very concerned about the decapitalisation rate and the current difference in practice between Scotland and England. Has he made any decisions about what the overall decapitalisation rate will be?

Mr. Ridley: I am disappointed at the progress that has been made in harmonising the basis of valuation, both on the formula basis and on the valuation of properties generally, between England and Scotland. I shall see if we can accelerate the process in order to bring equity between the two countries closer as soon as possible. At the moment I have nothing to report to my hon. Friend.

I have spoken for far too long, but that is not entirely my fault because I think that about half of my speech was taken up by hon. Members who intervened. I hope that I have shown that our approach to the transitional relief must be based on having the facts. I think that that is agreed by business. We shall come to a conclusion as soon as we have the facts. There will be consultation about them and the House will be able to express a view and to vote.

It is right to have a special scheme for small businesses to help them through this difficult period. We shall have powers to make another transitional scheme for 1995 after the first quinquennium. I hope that my hon. Friends will feel that that is the wisest way to respond to the very justifiable concerns of business. This will amply meet those concerns, but we must have the facts in order to plan the schemes in detail.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I am a new Member but undoubtedly other hon. Members will have experienced bigger shambles than the one with which we are now faced. Certainly this is a considerable shamble. At the last moment the Secretary of State offers us two thresholds for the definition of large and small businesses, and the definitions will be defined on a basis that will not

be known until after 1990. He offers us two different ceilings for transitional arrangements and two different kinds of transitional arrangement—one that will operate from 1990 and the other, if it can be defined, may exist after 1995.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): The Secretary of State is not listening.

Mr. Cousins: Perhaps the Secretary of State is in difficulty again. No doubt he has a hard time of it because every Thursday he offers more Maundy money to the people of Britain and every Thursday the stunned people of Britain throw it back in his face. That must be a difficult experience.

This strange structure that the right hon. Gentleman is offering us, of two different kinds of business defined by two different thresholds, operating on two different ceilings and two kinds of transitional arrangements, none of which he has specified, are being offered to us in the great and good cause of giving business men more stability and certainty in their arrangements. At one point in his speech the Secretary of State tantalised us with the possibility that he might be right. Since in his speech he attacked two cornerstones of the legislation, it would be churlish not to agree that for once he might be right.

Far from the allegations on which the legislation is based, the Secretary of State said that high rate poundages are not a free-standing phenomenon. That is a cornerstone of the case for the introduction of this legislation, but now the Secretary of State tells us that high rate poundages may be compensated by wonderful self-regulating mechanisms that link high rate poundages to low rateable values an to adjustments in rent. I do not believe in those wonderful self-regulating mechanisms. If I did, I would wonder why the enterprise zone experiment is a feature of the Government's legislative programme.

Mr. Butterfill: Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that the reason for making these difficult transitional arrangements and for the uncertainty arises not from what is proposed in the legislation—that national non-domestic rates will make a difference between north and south or between east and west of about 10 per cent. at most—but from the failure of successive Governments since 1973 to revalue the base? That is the problem that we are addressing, and it is that and not the legislation that is causing the difficulties.

6.45 pm

Mr. Cousins: That intervention brings me to the wonderful revelation made by the Secretary of State when he invited us to consider that he might be right. We spent many weeks in Committee and were continually told that rates have no connection with income. However, in this debate we were told by the Secretary of State that rates have a connection with profits. That answers the question by the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) and therein, unfortunately, lies the root of the damage that the Secretary of State has so casually done to the whole structure of his legislation.

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but surely it is a question of degree. The way in which rates may go up or down in any one year or the amount that they may rise as a result of revaluation, can cause considerable distress, depending on the actual amount. It is a question of degree. We know that rates as a proportion of a company's costs are low, but if they go up by a great deal, especially in a period of stability in other respects, they have a great marginal effect. We are talking about the problem of the degree of rise. That is why there can be a considerable effect and why the Secretary of State is right to talk about concessions.

Mr. Cousins: That is why the hon. Members for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) and for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) have departed the field. They have already spotted that we are not talking about matters of degree. They now see that the great promise of huge rate reductions in the north of England on which they were building all their hopes, have been at least severely compromised by what the Secretary of State has said.

Amendment No. 7 is in the name of the hon. Member for Kensington (Sir B. Rhys Williams) and I join in wishing him a speedy recovery. When speaking to that amendment the Secretary of State told us that its cost was equivalent to a 10 per cent. general rise in the uniform business rate. If the calculations with which we are dealing are so sensitive to the effect of amendment No. 7, the hon. Members for Batley and Spen and for Leeds, North-West are correct in supposing that the great promise of huge rate reductions in the north have been severely compromised by the Secretary of State.

Before we come to the architecture of these concessions, I should like to tell the House what the Secretary of State said in Standing Committee. When talking about how they should be financed, he said:

"the limits on any rate bill increases will have to be matched by the deferral of gains which would otherwise be due."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E,* 3 March 1988, c. 1214.]

It is not absolutely clear from what the Secretary of State said today whether he is standing by that statement. It looks and sounds as if he is standing by that statement, and the hon. Members for Batley and Spen and for Leeds, North-West certainly felt that. I give the Secretary of State credit for that. Those two Members have now departed because the Secretary of State's great concessions have been postponed to the indefinite future. They are lost in indefinite obscurities that he cannot even define for the Third Reading on Monday. These great concessions, the great reductions for northern business, are now severely compromised.

Mr. Leigh: What would be the effect on business rates in the hon. Gentleman's constituency if the present business rating system was kept, there was a revaluation and shopkeepers were required to pay a local income tax and rates based on capital value? That is Labour party policy.

Mr. Cousins: The hon. Gentleman invites me to consider the matter of capital value rates. I remind him that all the exemplifications that we have heard from the Government about the effect of capital value rates incorporate the continuation of resource grant equalisation. If one removed the effect of resource grant equalisation from assessments of what might be rates based upon capital values, the picture would be very different. It might even benefit the people of Canterbury quite as much as it would benefit the people of Newcastle. Perhaps we can return to that point later.

It is a pity that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, at his first Action for Cities breakfast in

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Newcastle, offered the business men of Newcastle a prediction of a 32 per cent. rates cut. I hope that he has been made aware of the Secretary of State's statements tonight. I hope that, at all the future breakfasts, he will incorporate in his predictions of rate reductions in our great northern cities the effect of the concession that has been offered this afternoon to business in the south, as a consequence of a rate revaluation which is part of the Government's policy.

Mr. Butterfill: Does the hon. Gentleman agree—this was a point of common ground between us in Committee—that the shopkeepers in his constituency of Newcastle, Central are likely to suffer dramatically because their rental values have risen above the average, and that they will be as much beneficiaries of my right hon. Friend's announcement this afternoon as anybody in the south? It is by no means clear that this is exclusively a north-south, east-west or any other geographical divide, although, in general terms, the north will benefit.

Mr. Cousins: I shall deal with that point in a moment.

My other point relates to the Secretary of State's remark that special capital allocations would be targeted at the need to create in cities important infrastructure, which would have to be introduced by the local council. At 8 o'clock, we are due to discuss rate support grant and I look forward to the Minister telling us that the revenue consequences of the expenditure on those capital allocations will form a proper part of the new revenue support grant system.

Unfortunately, the infrastructure on which we are invited to spend to assist industry carries with it revenue expenditure. For years, in the great northern cities, we have struggled to obtain a recognition of those central city services into which huge expenditure has been sunk by progressive councils in Leeds, Manchester and Newcastle. We have struggled to obtain proper and adequate recognition inside the rate support grant system of the consequences of the investments that we were making to improve and secure the commercial future of our cities.

If we are to have special capital allocations targeted at that kind of investment, with such consequences, I very much hope that we shall not be tricked again by the non-recognition inside the revenue support grant system of the revenue consequences of that expenditure.

Of course, it is true that in cities such as mine—where investment in the infrastructure has been great and sustained and where, even this year, a rate-capped council is investing in two new car parks, one in the shopping area and another in the commercial area of the city, to attract new opportunities for investment, and is prepared to meet the revenue deficits that accompany such investment—rental values for shops and offices have risen, despite the high rate poundages, faster and higher than in any other area of Britain. Shopping rental values in Newcastle have risen higher and faster over the past 10 or 12 years than in any other area of Britain, including Oxford street. That shows the benefits that can come from linking a concern for business, commerce and opportunity with progressive infrastructure spending in a sustained way through successive local government administrations.

It is precisely those connections that the Secretary of State, through these proposals, is now seeking to break and for which the offer of special capital allocations cannot possibly substitute. The moral of what the Government are doing to that sustained relationship between commerce and local councils is spelt out by the fact that the leader of the city council was not invited to attend the first Action for Cities breakfast. That shows the true value that some Members of the Government—I do not say all—place upon a positive, sustained relationship with local people and local industry.

We are now to face a period of enormous uncertainty as to what the Government's proposals mean. On the basis of what has been said this afternoon, no business man can work out for himself or herself, or for his or her business, the precise consequences of the proposals.

Mr. Heddle: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that my right hon. Friend's proposals, and the whole thrust of the reform, is to introduce certainty and stability into the commercial rate? Will the hon. Gentleman inform the House what certainty there was for an industrialist or a retailer in the London borough of Waltham Forest whose rates went up by 68 per cent. this year? What certainty was there last year for a business man in the area in which the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) lives, whose rates in the London borough of Ealing went up by over 60 per cent?

Mr. Cousins: If, over the past 10 years, the Government had been willing to offer local councils the same kind of certainty in the working of the rate support grant system that they have now offered business men through the uniform business rate, that confrontation might not have been necessary.

Mr. Ridley: During the years of high rate increases to which my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) referred, the rate support grant percentage has not been changed at all. It has remained at 46·2 per cent.

Mr. Cousins: I simply do not understand and I am happy to give way to the Secretary of State yet again. Each year there has been a reduction of rate support grant.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman was complaining that the reduction in the Government's rate support grant had led to those high rate increases, but, during the two years in which those rate increases have taken place, the Government's grant has not been cut. It has been kept at the same percentage.

7 pm

Mr. Cousins: No doubt the Secretary of State, with his great vision, could see all the way from Rochdale to Manchester were it not for the houses in between. Does the Secretary of State believe that local government finance is a year-on-year calculation, in which one year can be said to have ended and completely finished when the next year starts? Of course not. I am referring to the lack of stability in the rate support grant system. Even in the last couple of years, when there has been stability in the level of grant there has been continuing instability both in the distribution of rate support grant and in the amazing contraption of penalties and other features which have accompanied it.

I remind the Secretary of State that Newcastle is being rate-capped this year on the basis of a GRE assessment last year which he now admits was wrong. Therefore, if

Newcastle had been assessed last year on the GRE it had this year, it should not have been rate-capped at all. That is an example of the instability and uncertainty to which I referred.

I do not want to go on for too long, but, as the Secretary of State has now returned, perhaps he could reassure us about the special capital allocations to which he referred earlier. He did not state the size, but a continuing feature of the Secretary of State's remarks is a lack of precision. Perhaps he will tell us at 8 o'clock that the revenue consequences of those capital allocations will be restricted in the future revenue support grant distribution system. I should be happy to give way to him now so that he can give that guarantee.

The Secretary of State will not say anything. We realise that the uncertainties in the future pattern of uniform business rate are no doubt to become a structural feature of our debates after 8 o'clock, in which the Secretary of State will be unable to be precise about the future pattern of revenue support grant. Businesses in this country, both north and south, face a revaluation which will have unpredictable effects. On the basis of that revaluation, we are to have a new uniform business rate which cannot be specified or defined, the consequences of which for any part of the country or type of business cannot be quantified. This is the sorry state to which we and business have been brought by the proposals for this ludicrous community charge.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): I have not rebelled against the Bill at any stage, and I support the principle of the community charge. I believe that it is right for the country and the community generally. However, I do not believe that there should be any sacrifices on the altar of getting it right and getting rid of the domestic rate. Many small businesses, particularly in my constituency, believe that they are about to be sacrificed. That is why I put my name to amendment No. 7.

I listened carefully to what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, and I shall be studying his comments later. I do not criticise my right hon. Friend for this, because he is in enormous difficulty, but the situation is very "iffy". I am not sure what I can tell my constituents by way of reassurance on the matters that they have mentioned to me. For example, will the figures that my right hon. Friend is to produce, when the matter is discussed in the other place, be debateable here, or will we be presented with a fait accompli? I do not criticise my right hon. Friend, but I make the point that we should be able to discuss the details in this Chamber.

My right hon. Friend was interrupted frequently, and he gave way on a number of occasions, but there was one point that I would have wished to raise with him when he was telling us about his discussions with the CBI. The CBI has given us all a briefing—I am sure hon. Members on both sides of the House have received it; indeed, the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) referred to it —in which it says that for some businesses the combined effects of the uniform business rate and the revaluation will be catastrophic. I would have liked to hear from my right hon. Friend whether, after his meeting with the CBI, it was still of that view.

My information is that there will still be harm to smaller businesses. In reply to a letter from me, written on behalf of the Southwell branch of the National Federation of Self-Employed and Small Businesses Ltd., my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State said that my constituents' fears were exaggerated. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke of generous phasing arrangements. I want to put it on record, as many of my hon. Friends have done, that he ought to be thinking of increases of no more than 10 per cent., plus inflation.

I do not believe that the community charge is a tax and should therefore be geared to one's ability to pay. It is a charge, and as a charge it cannot be regarded by the Government or my right hon. Friend as a tax which has to be borne by the small business community until the whole thing is sorted out.

In his letter to me, my hon. Friend said:

"We have no reason to expect small businesses to fare worse than large, except to the extent that they are concentrated in the more buoyant retail and service sectors. Our forecasts suggest that most small shops will face modest increases in rateable value, with those over 50 per cent. being relatively uncommon."

That must be totally unacceptable for those who are in that position. It will not satisfy me, if I am to pay this charge, to be told that it is relatively uncommon and I will just have to get on with it. A business man will say, "My business is my business and my tax is my tax and you, as my Member of Parliament, must sort it out. If anything that your Government do puts me out of business, I object to it and I object to you, too."

A briefing from the Forum of Private Business tells us that under the present proposals some businesses could be subject to annual increases in community charge well above the rate of inflation, and in extreme cases for 20 years. During the transitional period, the maximum increase should be 10 per cent., after allowing for inflation. Surely that is not too much to concede if we are to have fundamental changes to business men's liabilities as a result of the Bill.

Five years is too short a transitional period. I would like my right hon. Friend to consider a much longer period. It is worth considering the impact of rates as they affect small businesses. I agree with my right hon. Friend that businesses in the front of a building pay more than those at the back. The National Feferation of Self-Employed and Small Businesses Ltd., in its briefing to right hon. and hon. Members, says that shops need to be at the front of buildings and, therefore that they are smaller units. Nevertheless, it means that a business in that location is on a higher basis for rating then any other type of commercial premises. That is why, when these matters are considered in another place we should be looking after smaller businesses.

Mr. Butterfill: That might be the case if one presumes that all small businesses and shops are in prime high street locations, but that is by no means true. A few of them are, but the vast majority are located in secondary or tertiary locations where the values are considerably lower. The organisation to which my hon. Friend referred has rather overstated its case.

Mr. Alexander: My hon. Friend may be right. In constituencies such as my own, which have smaller communities, most smaller businesses have what one might call high street sites: they are highly rented and highly rated. However, if I am right in what I have said, it follows that the ratio of rates to income is much larger for he smaller business than for the larger.

The community charge was introduced to bring a measure of justice and fairness to those hard pressed by the

[Mr. Alexander]

present rating system. I return to my preliminary point. I support the idea of the community charge and do not resile from it. Business men feel that their lack of representation, together with their obligation to be taxed, is unfair. They will still have no representation, but they are not looking for any. However, they look to this House for a new system that will be no more unfair than the one that we are trying to replace.

Without the back-up position provided by amendments such as those in the names of myself and my hon. Friends, I believe that there could be unfairness and an effect on small businesses' viability. This Government, above all, have always supported the smaller business men and business women and wished them increased success. I strongly urge my right hon. Friend to ensure that, when the Bill goes to another place, we do not desert them.

Mr. Holland: Rarely in the history of local government can any Secretary of State have asked so many of his right hon. and hon. Friends to follow him virtually blindfold into the Division Lobby over so major a provision as in this Bill. It has been the most remarkable performance.

My hon. Friends have already stressed that there are two threshold levels and a ceiling—a false ceiling, it seems—on differential policies for different types of firms. Nearly all of that is based on a false premise in the first place. The Government have failed to show that there is any correlation between rates and the closure of small or large firms. The Department of the Environment commissioned a study from the university of Cambridge department of land economy which found no evidence that changes in rate levels were linked to job losses. Evidence from enterprise zones has demonstrated that where rates were abolished, business rents were increased to compensate, with very little net gain, if any, to business. It is worth bearing in mind that the overall level of rates as a proportion of the total costs incurred by United Kingdom industrial and commercial firms, is less than 2 per cent.

That argument—so favoured by Conservative Members in the way in which they inveigh against local authorities, nearly all of which, in their lexicon of demonology, are Labour-controlled—is itself misplaced. The main problem for smaller businesses in the inner cities in Britain today, as in the post-war economy, is not local government but bigger business.

7.15 pm

The argument in relation to retailing shows that to be the case. In a series of parliamentary questions that I have tabled since entering this place I have asked what is the number of firms commanding the upper half of the United Kingdom retail trade—the more concentrated, larger firms. I am informed that in 1950 the figure was 4,750. But by 1986 it was only 94. It is the concentration of a larger share of the market in the hands of the multiples in retail distribution that has caused such problems for small firms.

That trend is not an abuse of the market—it is the working of the market. The market rewards the more efficient. The more efficient thereby grow larger and enjoy a bigger market share. They enjoy, as a result, lower unit costs and squeeze the corner shop and the small firm. The small corner shops and firms that continue to survive do so mainly because many of their customers do not have access to transport to visit large supermarkets.

This is the dynamics of the problem that the Government should be addressing, instead of imagining that the problem concerns rates. It is the dynamics of unequal competition, which is quite rightly addressed by my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench in new clause 6 in their concern to tackle the problem.

Mr. Butterfill: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the other consequence of the situation that he describes is that profit margins and prices to the consumer in the grocery trade, for example, have been dramatically reduced over the same period? The consumers have been the beneficiaries. It is because they have done so well that the effects that have been described in relation to small businesses have occurred. There is also the phenomenon of the corner shop, run by Mr. Patel or Mr. Singh, where standards of service are so much better and where the loyalty of customers is retained, despite the fact that their prices may be higher. Surely the future of small businesses lies in providing higher standards of service.

Mr. Holland: The first part of the hon. Gentleman's comments confirms my argument. Economies of scale and throughput in the large multiples are such that there is no way that small corner shops or even the routine high street retailer can compete.

The family shop—whether it is owned by Mr. Singh or Mr. Smith—is surviving by using unpaid family labour, often working very unsocial hours. The problems for such shops is not local rates or local government, but bigger business. That is a consequence of the Government failing to restrain the growth of bigger business. If they are not to do that, in terms of the efficiency argument made by the hon. Gentleman, they should compensate smaller shops on social grounds so that they may remain open.

There are strong social arguments for such shops remaining open. A single parent without a car, or pensioners, find it difficult either to get to supermarkets, even on public transport, or to carry back the volume of purchases that would make such a visit worth while.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): The hon. Gentleman has said that rate demands are not all that important, because they represent only 2 per cent. of a firm's turnover on average. Should he not look more carefully at the proportion of profit that that represents?

Mr. Holland: If we are considering the proportion of profit of bigger firms, there is some force in the argument that there should be more effective local taxation of that big business which is making supernormal profits. We need more transparency in the differential between the profits of different kinds of firms.

Mr. Knapman: What about small businesses?

Mr. Holland: That is the point that I am making. If we want the corner shops to stay open, faced with unequal competition, there is an argument on social grounds. Often, certainly in inner-city constituencies such as mine, the only lights that are on in the evening are those of the corner shop. If we want access to shopping in local communities, there is a case for a differential in the taxation of small and large businesses.

Another aspect of the underlying fallacy of the Government's approach—their attack on the basis of rates—relates very much to the London area. The reason for the decline in small manufacturing firms in inner London since the war is nothing to do with the rating system. In the 1950s and 1960s, expanding firms needed more size to achieve minimal economies of scale. But it was part of the consensus of the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, and of its industrial development certificate legislation, to forbid the expansion of firms over 15,000 sq ft without permission from the Board of Trade—more recently, the Department of Trade and Industry. For those reasons, many manufacturing firms left inner London and went to the new towns, and many remaining supplier firms were forced to close down.

Another reason is the same theme of unequal competition. A study by the community development project in Canning Town showed that over half the job losses in the area over a 10-year period, up the mid-1970s, were caused not by small firms moving out because of high rates, but by large multinational companies deciding to close down and move either to the new towns or abroad. The Government are failing to address problems of this kind.

The same applies to the transitional problems of the small firms that flourish and succeed. There is evidence, in a recent study by Professor Storey of Newcastle university and others of the death rate of small firms, that of any 100 firms that have started within the last 10 years, 80 are now dead. Of the remaining firms, four on average are responsible for creating half the remaining employment.

The reasons for the failure of those firms often relate to their difficulties in coping not with local rates, but with the transition from being a small family-managed company to being a more modern multi-product, multi-division or multi-regional enterprise. Most do not make the transition, and the Government's industrial policies do not help, because they do not identify or even recognise the problems of that transition.

Such factors are far more important than rates in relation to the difficulties faced by small and medium-sized firms today. We are virtually the only European country without a real policy for small and medium firms. France has an SME policy; Germany has its Mittelstandspolitik. Other Governments admit the problems, but ours do not. They have wrongly identified rates as the crucial factor.

There is a further problem. Where is the incentive for local authorities to provide better services when the responsibility for the revenue is taken from them? *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) made some forceful interventions earlier. If he wishes to intervene I shall be happy to respond, but other hon. Members wish to speak.

Where are the incentives for local authorities to provide decent roads, transport, signalling systems, police, fire and other protection services, environmental health, consumer protection and training if they are not responsible for raising the necessary revenue? That point has been raised by other hon. Members, and it is a forceful one. It is another reason why, in my view, the new clause supported by my hon. Friends is correct, and the Government's rationale is entirely wrong.

Mr. Graham Bright (Luton, South): The one dread that most business people feel is that of the rates bill. It cannot be offset, and, however clever his accountant, the ratepayer must pay the money up front. Whenever the future of the rates is discussed, terror is projected into the hearts of most business men, but of small business men in particular.

It has been said this afternoon that there are many views on this issue. That is clear from the various reports by the organisations representing businesses, large and small, and by the valuers. The one factor common to them all is that, without doubt, there will be anomalies, and it is those anomalies about which I am concerned.

I am not talking only about retailers. There are many other small firms in our city centres, in areas that are premium sites, sometimes for historical reasons. They may be involved in crafts or in the service industries. Some historically own their premises, so they will not be too worried about rents, but will be very concerned about rates.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for listening to what some of us have said during recent months, and for his announcement this afternoon. I had prepared a very different speech, because I did not know what he was going to say, but what he has said answers most of the fears that are felt. There is to be a cushioning, and a ceiling is to be imposed. That is important. If we know that a change is to be made, but do not know whether it will be an increase or a decrease—if we just pay five times as much, or what—we obviously feel worried. I should be even happier if I knew what the ceiling was to be, but at least we know that there is to be one. We also know that there is to be a transitional period extending beyond what was originally put in the Bill, and that, too, will allay the fears of many businesses.

More important, my right hon. Friend has recognised that the new rating system could hit small businesses harder than large businesses. I am glad, therefore, that he has introduced a different ceiling for small businesses. Above all, this is the time when the Government should take powers to deal with the problems—although we can argue that we do not know precisely what they will be. We should support what my right hon. Friend has said, because he is taking powers that will be essential when the unified business rate is introduced.

Mr. Ridley: It may help my hon. Friend on the timing point if I say that I hope to receive the full analysis of the results of the revaluation in August or September this year. It will then be possible to suggest the type of scheme that can go out to consultation. That leaves 18 months before the new system comes into effect. There is therefore plenty of time for people to become aware of what they face. The details of the new valuation lists for individual businesses will not, of course, be available until many months later, but the scheme can be based on analysis of the results.

Mr. Bright: That was a most reassuring and helpful intervention.

Although to some extent we are going into the unknown, I am much more confident following this afternoon's statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I believe that small businesses and businesses in general can put aside some of their fears. I hope that the organisations which have been campaigning will help small businesses to take account of what is happening and will not constantly pump up fears. I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for his comments.

7.30 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise some points that have not yet been covered. A carrot has been offered to hon. Members who represent the large cities in the north of England: industries there will be better off following the introduction of the national non-domestic rate. Although initially it will possibly have a deleterious effect in the south of England, especially in the service and more buoyant sectors, a big carrot for the north has been presented at some of the working breakfasts which were attended by colleagues of the Secretary of State. It has been said that substantial reductions will be available in the north, especially in manufacturing industries.

Problems will arise in Cardiff, which has some similarities with the large cities of the north in that it is an intermediate area and, therefore, is recognised as requiring incentives to attract more business, jobs and manufacturing. However, in terms of the treatment of the national non-domestic rate, Cardiff seems to fit in more with large areas in the south of England and no concessions appear to have been given. The Cardiff area, its businesses and manufacturing will be substantially worse off, even though the Government categorise it as an intermediate area requiring assistance.

If the non-domestic rate had been in force this year, rates for Cardiff businesses would have increased by 12·3 per cent., which would have meant an additional tax on business of £5 million. An additional tax of £5 million makes little sense in an area designated by the Government as assisted and therefore needing all the assistance that it can get to create new jobs.

The Government will have to spend more money from their regional assistance budget to make good that £5 million tax imposed on Cardiff businesses. To paraphrase the words of the Secretary of State this afternoon, he intends the new system of non-domestic rates to create more small businesses. Some of those businesses were large before he started, but they will be small by the time he has finished.

Have the Secretary of State for the Environment and his Welsh Office colleagues given special thought to the implications of the national non-domestic rate, not just in the north where it has been presented as a carrot, but in parts of Wales which will do worse out of the new system than under the present system? Does Cardiff need an extra £5 million tax from the imposition of the national non-domestic rate?

Mr. Butterfill: Does the hon. Gentleman appreciate the interrelationship between the national non-domestic rate and the revaluation which gives a true guide to what will happen? Since Cardiff in general has had lower rate valuation increases since 1973 than most of the rest of the country in respect of its commercial and industrial activities, it should end up as a net beneficiary of the overall system.

Mr. Morgan: I think that the hon. Gentleman makes unwarranted assumptions which are not based on any local knowledge of Cardiff. I listened carefully to the Secretary of State, who appears to be under the misapprehension that rentals will be a kind of residual at the end of the revaluation exercise and the imposition of the national non-domestic rate. The national non-domestic rate may be imposed first and then, roughly at the same time, the rating revaluation, followed by reassessment of rent.

The Secretary of State said that the rent would probably be determined by what people could afford to pay not to have empty shops or factories. If rent levels are reassessed just before the introduction of the NNDR and the revaluation, the NNDR cannot be adjusted—it is a fixed sum—that could lead to massive brankruptcies. Free market forces combined with the imposition of a national non-domestic rate will, occasionally, benefit firms if the calculations are correct about rent being a residual, but in a capricious way.

Cardiff, as a business centre, has low rates and has been economical in spending public money. It will do badly out of the new system. There will be no incentive to retain the present system whereby, as part of its armoury in attracting new businesses, it has the sixth lowest business rates in England and Wales. With only intermediate area status to offer in Cardiff, there will be no incentive for proper accounting of public money by the county council, which is in charge of economic development.

Mr. Burt: I am sorry that the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) is no longer in the Chamber. Recently I picked up at the remainders desk in Stamford public library a copy of his great tome "The Socialist Challenge". I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on it and am sorry that he is not here. I shall content myself with congratulating the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) on his great work in last week's marathon. I hope that the cause for which he ran was well supported.

I echo the sympathy behind the amendments on small businesses and welcome the comments of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. As a representative of the north-west, may I say how keen we in the north are that concessions to small businesses are not made too much at the expense of the north. The north stands to gain from the unified business rate, and we are grateful for that. That advantage is much needed.

The north is on the brink of change. It has been through some of the dark days and is looking to a bright future. The vast majority of us know that the north is no longer simply the birthplace of Crompton, Kay and Arkwright and of the industries at the heart of the industrial revolution and Britain's energy in the 19th century. It is the place also where the newer technologies are finding a home and it is at the heart of the change which is affecting Britain in terms of world markets.

This is exactly the time when industry should look to locate in the north and especially the north-west. That is why the announcement of the uniform business rate found such favour with our businesses in the north. It is about time that we said loudly and clearly that there are plenty of reasons, for locating in the north. Location advantages provided artificially by Governments are not always the best reasons, but while they exist full use should be made of them.

Mr. Couchman: Although I can understand precisely why businesses in the north-west should welcome the proposed changes, does my hon. Friend accept that in many places in the south-east there is just as great a depression as in parts of the north? My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) is sitting next to my

hon. Friend. My constituency is in much the same position as his. There are places other than the City and Thames corridor in the south-east. Many businesses there view these changes with great alarm and apprehension.

Mr. Burt: I shall come to that point later, as I do not wish to get involved in a colleague-to-colleague battle.

As a matter of general principle, it is recognised by the House that the greatest difficulties that this country has faced since the war have been concentrated in areas which depended on traditional manufacturing industries which have suffered greatly because of industrial change. As we consider the problems of one nation, it is fair that we should examine the advantages for those areas and say, "Thank you very much, this is about time."

I shall say something about small businesses in a moment. Although we gain financial advantage in the north, there are other reasons for supporting the uniform business rate. First, revaluation had to come about. My constituents will face the greatest problems through the change in the domestic local government system precisely because revaluations were fudged for years. If there had been revaluations, we would not be facing such problems with the community charge.

I do not think that those problems should be laid at the door of the Government, in considering the changes in local government finance. The problems of revaluation in the south-east can be attributed to the same cause. We should have had revaluation earlier. We did not, and we will have to pay the price, but we would have had to pay the price sooner or later. It is about time for revaluation.

Secondly, we accept that the present system is so outrageously complex that a change had to come. We appreciate that the change in the system through the uniform business rate will simplify and help, and we welcome that.

Thirdly, little has been said about the prospect of index-linked changes following the creation of the uniform business rate. It has been mentioned only in passing. During the 1970s, when the rapid rise in inflation was causing very large changes in rates for businesses throughout the country, those who lived in the areas which suffered excessive changes in rates year after year will realise—or their businesses will realise—how welcome is index-linking. It is about time that that was introduced, and it will be important and welcome.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Hear, hear.

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend is extremely perceptive. She recognises the importance of this matter. She is usually right, and she is right about this.

I now turn to the matter mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman)—the problem of small businesses. If we talk seriously about one nation, and if those of us in the north recognise that the change to the uniform business rate will help the industrial areas of the north, it is also true that those in the north should be concerned about sudden changes elsewhere. It is not fair that we should take advantage of this measure if there is to be major disadvantage elsewhere.

As my hon. Friend rightly said, not everyone in the south and the south-east is a yuppie stockbroker. Many people in the south-east have problems and many small businesses have difficulties. If we are concerned about our position and if we welcome the changes that benefit us, surely it is right that we spare some thought for those who may be caught in a once-only position because of the revaluation arrangements and the changes in rate poundages. We recognise their difficulties and that is why we welcome the transitional arrangements to assist them. Far be it from us to say no. We shall all benefit sooner or later because problems for small businesses can lead to unemployment and bankruptcy, and we do not want that.

My right hon. Friend announced some sensible concessions. He has made very clear his intention to help small businesses and he knows the concerns of those of us in the north. We do not want to see those concessions made at our expense. My right hon. Friend is well aware of that. He nods in assent to show that he has taken that on board. However, we recognise that he can help small businesses in the south that might be affected badly. Because of the working of the uniform business rate, and because of its sectoral impact, parts of the north where there are many new businesses may face a rise rather than a fall in their rates and may benefit from the transitional arrangements. We recognise that in general we shall benefit, and we welcome what is being done for others.

7.45 pm

Mr. Cousins: Some of us from the north are concerned about the effect of the uniform business rate on the depressed Medway towns where there is a projected increase of 28 per cent. How does the Secretary of State propose to index-link rateable values as well as rate poundages?

Mr. Burt: That is a question for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Ridley: The simple answer is that I do not intend to index-link rateable values.

Mr. Burt: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already announced that there will be a continuing system of revaluation. We have needed that for a long time. The fact that there has been no revaluation for so long has led to a big jump now. The hon. Gentleman missed precisely that point.

I conclude by saying that the changes in the uniform business rate will help many areas in the north and are to be welcomed. Because we are truly one nation, we recognise that we do not wish to cause problems for small businesses in the south who may face difficulties. The changes will benefit us, but we do not wish it to be at the expense of anywhere else. We very much welcome the concessions that my right hon. Friend announced today. We know that he has taken on board the concerns of the north and listened to the problems of small businesses in the south. We look forward to supporting him warmly in the Lobby this evening.

Mr. Worthington: I shall make only a brief contribution. I was hesitant about contributing to this debate, which is mainly about England and Wales, until I heard with amazement the words of the Secretary of State. I was going to complain that there was not to be a uniform business rate for Scotland in 1990 as there was for the rest of the United Kingdom, but to my amazement the Secretary of State announced that there were to be transitional arrangements in Scotland for a non-existent reform. He did not mention that to the Secretary of State for Scotland and spoke only about the harmonisation of

[Mr. Worthington]

rates, so I very much look forward to hearing from the Secretary of State next week the details of the transitional arrangements for that non-existent reform.

In Scotland, there would be great benefits from a uniform business rate, especially in the poorest areas, but it is not to be. In my constituency, a most deprived region, there would be a transfer of £59 million to Strathclyde. That is not to occur because the major loser would be Dumfries and Galloway, which happens to be in the constituency of the Minister of State, Scottish Office.

I am pleased to see signs of the north-south divide among Conservative Members. They now know what we have been suffering for many years. One of the major problems that will exist because there will not be a uniform business rate in Scotland, in terms of the slow progress of harmonisation between England, Wales and Scotland, is that the present disadvantage of high rateable values in Scotland will be made even worse. For example, the Scottish Exhibition Centre pays the same rates as the National Exhibition Centre, but is five times smaller. The rates for the pipeline which runs from Grangemouth to Wilton halve as the pipeline crosses the border.

In Scotland, the rates are about double what they are in the north of England. It is estimated that when the uniform business rate is introduced in England and Wales, there will be a further subsidy of about one third to the north of England. The implications of that for business in Scotland are truly horrendous. The Secretary of State seems to care not at all about that, which is odd, because he says that the major disadvantage of devolution is high taxation rates. However, he is applying a high taxation rate to Scotland by failing to harmonise the rates in England, Wales and Scotland.

I doubt whether the Secretary of State talks as often as he says he does to his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, but I ask him to have further conversations with his right hon. and learned Friend about the possibility of harmonising the rating values of England, Wales and Scotland much more rapidly than the earliest possible estimate, which is 1995.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I have sat through the debate, and it is clear to me that the Secretary of State has lost the argument. It was suggested earlier that the Bill should be withdrawn, and that would be the best course to adopt.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) has just referred to Scotland. The Opposition believe that further explanations should be offered about what is to happen in Scotland. If what the Secretary of State has told the House is to come about, changes will have to be made in Scotland.

The Secretary of State referred to the survey by the National Federation of Self-Employed and Small Businesses. He derided the federation's survey. On 19 February, the members of the Standing Committee on the Local Government Finance Bill received a letter from the secretary of the federation, saying that the federation was worried about the problems that the uniform business rate would create for small firms and that it had attempted to analyse the position throughout the country. According to the letter, information was supplied to the federation by valuation experts. That information was not supplied, as the Secretary of State suggested, by members of the federation.

It referred also to advice from the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope), that the revaluation of small businesses would result in rateable value increases, on average, of between 5 and 6 per cent. The Under-Secretary of State also said that the uniform business rate poundage would be reduced—by an equal and opposite amount.

There will be substantial increases throughout the country if the uniform business rate, as outlined today by the Secretary of State, is imposed. We are told that a shop in Doncaster that now pays £1,184 in rates will have its rates increased by 34 per cent. to £1,587. In Barnsley, the rates of an industrial unit will be increased by 23 per cent. In Northumberland, the rates of a restaurant, now £3,500, will be increased to £6,075—an increase of 74 per cent. Many properties will face substantial increases. In Salop, Hereford and Worcester, for example, a furniture shop, whose rates are now £450, will, under the new system, be increased to £1,013—an increase of 125 per cent. Those are the kinds of increases that small businesses will have to bear.

The Secretary of State said that small businesses will need time to adjust to the revaluation. Much more attention needs to be paid to that timing, because small businesses are reeling under the Secretary of State's proposals. I hope that he will be more specific about the transitional period. We welcomed his reference to charities, but we await what the small print will reveal. Throughout his 51-minute speech the Secretary of State's only constructive proposal related to charities.

I have received representations from community and town councils about how they will fare under the distribution of the non-domestic rate. The Welsh community and town councils say that they will fare the worst, as they will receive no part of the non-domestic rate. I hope that the Secretary of State will consider the request that has been made by the town and community councils of Wales.

The hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) referred to the Kirklees and Wakefield chamber of commerce and industry in west Yorkshire, which has written to all Members with west Yorkshire constituencies. It says:

> "This Chamber has steadfastly supported the principles of regular revaluations and the introduction of a Uniform Business Rate . . . revaluation would redress this imbalance, whilst the introduction of UBR would provide a nationwide equitable system of business rating."

The Minister for Local Government bandied about the figure of £700 million for the north of England. We are now told that the north of England will not benefit by that amount. The secretary of the Kirklees and Wakefield chamber of commerce and industry said that the chamber was writing to hon. Members to inform them of its very real concern that these benefits will not now accrue to local businesses. It is far from happy that the Secretary of State and the Minister for Local Government should initially have promised such significant revaluation benefits and the uniform business rate to businesses in the north. It suggests on behalf of industry and commerce in that area, that the Secretary of State should clarify how revaluation and the uniform business rate, will apply to the north.

It certainly seems that support for the unified business rate will diminish, that any promises that have been made by the Minister for Local Government have been withdrawn, and that these proposals will deprive local small businesses in west Yorkshire of £700 million. This situation cannot be tolerated. I hope that there will be a retraction of what the Secretary of State has said, because it is creating problems in the north of England.

Mr. Ridley *rose*——

Mr. O'Brien: I am sorry, but I have to say that the Secretary of State has made this clear. [HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] Conservative Members have shown their reaction to that decision. The presentation by the Secretary of State tonight——

Mr. Ridley *rose*——

Mr. O'Brien: Once again, hon. Members have shown that this is an unpopular Bill. It has no support in the House, and it has no support outside. We ask that the House supports amendment No. 7.

Mr. Ridley *rose*——

Mr. O'Brien: This will give an opportunity to the House to divide again.

It being Eight o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Orders [22 February and 13 April] and the Resolution [18 April], to put the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

The House divided: Ayes 206, Noes 329.

Division No. 271] **[8 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gordon, Mildred
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop
and Mr. Robert Adley.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard

Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones

Amendment accordingly negatived.

It being after Eight o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put forthwith the Question on amendments moved by a member of the Government up to the end of clause 81 and new clause 15.*

Schedule 4

NON-DOMESTIC RATING: EXCEPTION

Amendment made: No. 63, in page 94, line 1, leave out sub-paragraph (5) and insert—

'(5) Regulations under sub-paragraph (1) above in their application to a particular financial year (including regulations amending or revoking others) shall not be effective unless they come into force before 1 January in the preceding financial year.'.—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Schedule 5

NON-DOMESTIC RATING: VALUATION

Amendments made: No. 11, in page 94, line 22, leave out 'less than 51p' and insert '50p or less'.

No. 12, in page 95, line 34, leave out 'less than 51p' and insert '50p or less'.—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Schedule 6

NON-DOMESTIC RATING: MULTIPLIERS

Amendments made: No. 13, in page 95, line 47, leave out 'one decimal place' and insert 'three decimal places'.

No. 179, in page 96, line 17, at end add

'; but if the Treasury so provide by order in relation to the year concerned, B is a figure which is less than that index and which is specified in (or calculated in a manner specified in) the order.'.

No. 180, in page 96, line 39, leave out from 'as' to end of line 40 and insert 'he determines'.

No. 14, in page 96, line 42, leave out from beginning of line to end of line 46 and insert

'three decimal places only—

(a) adding one thousandth where (apart from this sub-paragraph) there would be more than five ten-thousandths, and

(b) ignoring the ten-thousandths where (apart from this sub-paragraph) there would be five, or less than five, ten-thousandths.'.

No. 181, in page 96, line 46, at end insert—

'(10) The power to make an order under sub-paragraph (3) above shall be exercisable by statutory instrument.

(11) An order under sub-paragraph (3) above in its application to a particular financial year (including an order amending or revoking another) shall not be effective unless it is approved by resolution of the House of Commons before the approval by that House of the revenue support grant report for the year or before 1 March in the preceding financial year (whichever is earlier).'

No. 182, in page 97, line 2, after 'contain', insert '(a)'.

No. 183, in page 97, line 3, at end insert

', and

(b) the date determined by him under paragraph 5(8) above for the purpose of making the estimates.

(3) A calculation under sub-paragraph (1) above is invalid unless one or both of the following conditions is fulfilled—

(a) it is made after the revenue support grant report for the year has been approved by resolution of the House of Commons;

(b) it is made on or after 1 March in the preceding financial year.

(4) A calculation under sub-paragraph (1) above is invalid if made at a time when an order under paragraph 5(3) above which is effective in relation to the year has not come into force.'.

No. 15, in page 97, line 11, leave out 'one decimal place' and insert 'three decimal places'.

No. 184, in page 97, line 23, at end insert—

'(3A) An order may be made under paragraph 5(3) above in relation to a financial year beginning in or after 1991 even if a multiplier is or may be specified for the year under paragraph 7 above.'.

No. 16, in page 97, line 32, leave out 'one decimal place' and insert 'three decimal places'.

No. 64, in page 97, line 40, leave out sub-paragraph (4) and insert—

'(4) An order under sub-paragraph (3) above in its application to a particular financial year (including an order amending or revoking another) shall not be effective unless it comes into force before 1 January in the preceding financial year.'.

No. 72, in page 98, line 20, leave out 'expiry' and insert 'end'.—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Clause 51

NON-DOMESTIC RATING POOL

Amendment made: No. 104, in page 28, line 24, leave out

'establishment and maintenance of the non-domestic rating pool'

and insert

'keeping of non-domestic rating accounts, and for sums to be paid to and by the Secretary of State'.—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Schedule 7

NON-DOMESTIC RATING POOL

Amendments made: No. 110, in page 98, line 25, leave out from beginning to end of line 35 and insert—

'NON-DOMESTIC RATING: POOLING

PART I

NON-DOMESTIC RATING ACCOUNTS

The accounts

1.—(1) In accordance with this Schedule the Secretary of State shall keep for each chargeable financial year an account (to be called a non-domestic rating account).

(2) The Secretary of State—

(a) shall keep each account in such form as the Treasury may direct, and

(b) shall at such time as the Treasury may direct send copies of each account to the Comptroller and Auditor General.'

No. 174, in page 98, line 37, leave out 'accounts' and insert 'account'.

No. 175, in page 98, line 38, leave out 'accounts' and insert 'account'.

No. 176, in page 98, line 40, leave out from beginning to end of line 9 on page 99 and insert—

'Credits and debits

2.—(1) For each chargeable financial year the following shall be credited (as items of account) to the account kept for the year—

(a) sums received by the Secretary of State in the year under section 46 above,

(b) sums received by him in the year under regulations made under section 50(2) above, and

(c) sums received by him in the year under paragraph 5 below.

(2) For each chargeable financial year the following shall be debited (as items of account) to the account kept for the year—

(a) payments made by the Secretary of State in the year under paragraph 5(10) below or under regulations made under paragraph 6(4) below, and

(b) payments made by him in the year under paragraph 8, 11 or 12 below (as the case may be).

3.(1) As soon as is reasonably practicable after the end of each chargeable financial year the Secretary of State shall calculate the following—

(a) the aggregate of the items of account credited to the account kept for the year, and

(b) the aggregate of the items of account debited to the account kept for the year.

(2) If the aggregate mentioned in sub-paragraph (1)(a) above exceeds that mentioned in sub-paragraph (1)(b) above, a sum equal to the excess shall be—

(a) debited (as an item of account) to the account kept for the year, and

(b) credited (as an item of account) to the account kept for next financial year.

(3) If the aggregate mentioned in sub-paragraph (1)(b) above exceeds that mentioned in sub-paragraph (1)(a) above, a sum equal to the excess shall be—

(a) credited (as an item of account) to the account kept for the year, and

(b) debited (as an item of account) to the account kept for the next financial year.

PART II

CONTRIBUTION'

No. 65, in page 99, line 29, leave out sub-paragraph (5) and insert—

'(5) Regulations under this paragraph in their application to a particular financial year (including regulations amending or revoking others) shall not be effective unless they come into force before 1 January in the preceding financial year.'.

No. 111, in page 100, line 12, leave out 'from the pool' and insert

'under the relevant provisions (within the meaning given by paragraph 6(7) below)'.

No. 112, in page 100, line 14, leave out 'from the pool' and insert

'under the relevant provisions'.

No. 113, in page 100, line 22, leave out 'be liable to'.

No. 114, in page 100, line 23, leave out 'by' and insert 'at'.

No. 115, in page 100, line 25, leave out 'be liable to'.

No. 116, in page 100, line 26 *[Schedule 7]*, at end insert '; and the amount shall be at such time as he decides with the Treasury's approval.'

No. 117, in page 100, line 50, at end insert—

'(7) For the purposes of paragraph 5(7) above the relevant provisions are—

(a) paragraph 5(10) above.

(b) regulations made under sub-paragraph (4) above, and

(c) paragraphs 8, 11 and 12 below.

Recovery

6A. Where an amount has become payable under any provision of or made under this Part of this Schedule, and it has not been paid, it shall be recoverable in a court of competent jurisdiction.'.

No. 185, in page 101, line 1, leave out from beginning to end of line 15 and insert—

'PART III

DISTRIBUTION

Distributable amount

7.—(1) Before a chargeable financial year begins the Secretary of State shall estimate—

(a) the aggregate of the items of account which will be credited to the account kept for the year, and

(b) the aggregate of the items of account which will be debited to the account kept for the year under paragraphs 2(2)(a) and 3(3)(b) above.

(2) In making any estimate under sub-paragraph (1) above the Secretary of State may make such assumptions as he sees fit.

(3) If the aggregate estimated under sub-paragraph (1)(a) above exceeds the aggregate estimated under sub-paragraph (1)(b) above the Secretary of State shall calculate the amount equal to the difference.'.

No. 186, in page 101, line 22 leave out from beginning to second 'the' in line 23 and insert

'If the revenue support grant report for a chargeable financial year is approved by resolution of the House of Commons, as soon as is reasonably practicable after the report is approved'.

No. 17, in page 101, line 40, leave out 'less than £51' and insert '£50 or less'.

No. 187, in page 102 line 13, leave out from beginning to'the' in line 15 and insert

'If the revenue support grant report for a chargeable financial year is approved by resolution of the House of Commons, as soon as is reasonably practicable after the report is approved'.

No. 18, in page 102, line 33, leave out 'less than £51' and insert '£50 or less'.

No. 188, in page 102, line 44, leave out from beginning to third 'the' in line 45 and insert 'If the revenue support grant report for the year is approved by resolution of the House of Commons, as soon as is reasonably practicable after the report is approved'.

No. 119, in page 103, line 49, at end insert—

'Recovery

15. Where an amount has become payable under any provision of this Part of this Schedule, and it has not been paid, it shall be recoverable in a court of competent jurisdiction.'.—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Schedule 8

NON-DOMESTIC RATING: ADMINISTRATION

Amendments made: No. 55, in page 104, line 42, leave out paragraph 3 and insert—

'3.—(1) This paragraph applies to any sum which has become payable to a charging authority under any provision included under paragraph 2 above and has not been paid.

(2) Regulations under this Schedule may include, as regards the recovery of such a sum, provison—

(a) allowing a liability order to be made:

(b) allowing distress and sale of goods:

(c) allowing commitment to prison.

(3) The regulations may include provision equivalent to any included under Parts II and VII of Schedule (Community charges: enforcement) above subject to any modifications the Secretary of State thinks fit.

(4) The regulations may include provision that—

(a) a sum to which this paragraph applies shall be recoverable in a court of competent jurisdiction, and

(b) such method of recovery shall be available as an alternative to any method included under sub-paragraph (2) above

3A.—This paragraph applies to—

(a) any sum which has become payable to the Secretary of State under any provision included under paragraph 2 above and has not been paid;

(b) any sum which has become payable (by way of repayment) to a person other than a charging authority or the Secretary of State under any provision included under paragraph 2 above and has not been paid.

(2) Regulations under this Schedule may include provision that such a sum shall be recoverable in a court of competent jurisdiction.'.

No 33, in page 105, line 29, leave out '(g)' and insert '(f)'.—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Clause 54

HEREDITAMENTS

Amendment made: No. 68, in page 29, line 29, leave out from beginning to end of line 32 and insert—

'(a) a county council.
(b) a district council.
(c) a London borough council.
(d) the Common Council'.—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Clause 56

DOMESTIC PROPERTY

Amendment made: No. 195, in page 31, line 9, leave out 'purposes' and insert 'purpose'.—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Schedule 9

RESIDUAL RATING MULTIPLIERS

Amendment made: No. 19, in page 107, line 26, leave out from 'to' to end of line 31 and insert

'three decimal places only—
(a) adding one thousandth where (apart from this sub-paragraph) there would be more than five ten-thousandths, and
(b) ignoring the ten-thousandths where (apart from this sub-paragraph) there would be five, or less than five, ten-thousandths.'—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Schedule 10

RESIDUAL RATING: STANDARD AMOUNTS

Amendment made: No. 20, in page 108, line 21, leave out 'less than 51p' and insert '50p or less'.—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Schedule 11

RESIDUAL RATING: ADMINISTRATION

Amendment made: No. 56, in page 109, line 14, leave out paragraph 3 and insert—

'3.—(1) This paragraph applies to any sum which has become payable to a charging authority under any provision included under paragraph 2 above and has not been paid.

(2) Regulations under this Schedule may include, as regards the recovery of such a sum, provision—
(a) allowing a liability order to be made;
(b) requiring information to be given;
(c) allowing attachment of earnings;
(d) allowing distress and sale of goods;
(e) allowing commitment to prison;
(f) creating associated offences.

(3) The regulations may include provision equivalent to any included under Parts II and VII of Schedule *(Community charges: enforcement)* above subject to any modifications the Secretary of State thinks fit.

3A.—(1) This paragraph applies to any sum which has become payable (by way of repayment) to a person other than a charging authority under any provision included under paragraph 2 above and has not been paid.

(2) Regulations under this Schedule may include provision that such a sum shall be recoverable in a court of competent jurisdiction.'.

No. 34, in page 109, line 47, leave out '(g)' and insert '(f)'.—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Clause 73

HEREDITAMENTS AND DOMESTIC PROPERTY

Amendment made: No. 69, in page 40, line 8, leave out from beginning to end of line 11 and insert—

'(a) a county council.
(b) a district council.
(c) a London borough council,
(d) the Common Council.'.—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Clause 77

GENERAL AND SPECIAL EXPENSES

Amendments made: No. 24, in page 42, line 22, at end insert 'and'.

No. 25, in page 42, line 23, leave out from 'Authority' to end of line 24.—*[Mr. Howard.]*

New clause 15

PAYMENTS TO AND FROM AUTHORITIES

'(1) The Secretary of State may make regulations in relation to any case where—
(a) he is liable to pay to a receiving authority at any time an amount or amounts under one or more of the first relevant provisions, and
(b) the authority is liable to pay to him at the same time an amount or amounts under one or more of the second relevant provisions.

(2) The regulations may provide that if the total of the amount or amounts mentioned in subsection (1)(a) above exceeds the total of the amount or amounts mentioned in subsection (1)(b) above, he may set off the latter in paying the former.

(3) The regulations may provide that if the total of the amount or amounts mentioned in subsection (1)(b) above exceeds the total of the amount or amounts mentioned in subsection (1)(a) above, the authority shall set off the latter in paying the former.

(4) The regulations may provide that if the total of the amount or amounts mentioned in subsection (1)(a) above is the same as the total of the amount or amounts mentioned in subsection (1)(b) above no payment need be made in respect of the former or the latter.

(5) Without prejudice to section 136(2) below, the regulations may include provision—
(a) treating any liability mentioned in subsection (1) above as discharged accordingly;
(b) requiring prescribed provisions of this Act (such as sections 85(2) and 92(2)) to be read subject to the regulations;
(c) requiring prescribed provisions of this Act (such as paragraph 2 of Schedule 7) to be read as if references to sums received or payments made were to sums or payments which would have been received or made apart from the regulations.

(6) Each of the following is a receiving authority—
(a) a charging authority, and
(b) in the application of this section to Wales, a county council.

(7) The first relevant provisions are sections 89 and 92 above, paragraph 5(10) of Schedule 7 below, regulations made under paragraph 6(4) of that Schedule, and paragraphs 8, 11 and 12 of that Schedule.

(8) The second relevant provisions are section 89 above and paragraph 5 of Schedule 7 below.'.—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 84

REVENUE SUPPORT GRANT

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I beg to move amendment No. 173, in page 46, line 6, at end insert

and (c) shall take into account—
(i) the latest information available to him as to the aggregate of all authorities' expenditure.
(ii) any probable fluctuation in the demand for services giving rise to additional expenditure,

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

so far as the fluctuation is attributable to circumstances which are not under the control of the local authorities;

(iii) the need for developing those services and the extent to which, having regard to general economic conditions, it is reasonable to develop them; and

(iv) the current level of prices, costs and remuneration and any future variation in that level which in the opinion of the Secretary of State will result from decisions which appear to him to be final and which will have the effect of increasing or decreasing any particular prices, costs or remuneration.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient to consider the following amendments: No. 156, in clause 86, page 46, leave out lines 34 to 41 and insert—

'86 (1) The Secretary of State shall—

(a) determine in relation to each charging and precepting authority notional expenditure assessments having regard to their functions and needs in accordance with principles to be applied to all authorities, and

(b) make report containing the basis on which he proposes to distribute among receiving authorities those amounts of revenue support grant which fall to be paid to such authorities under this Part, being a basis which has regard to the notional expenditure assessment determined under subsection (1)(a) above.

(2) Before determining the notional expenditure assessment or making the report under subsection (1) above, the Secretary of State shall consult such associations of local authorities as appear to him to be concerned and with any local authority with whom consultation appears to him to be desirable.

(3) This report shall be laid before the House of Commons and shall specify the principles on which the notional expenditure assessments and basis of distribution are determined'.

No. 268, in page 46, line 37, at end insert

'after consultation with receiving and notifiable authorities concerned'.

Mr. Rooker: Amendments Nos. 173 and 156 are both official Opposition amendments replicating amendments that we dealt with in Committee. In Committee the amendments were numbered 751 and 756. We make no apology for returning to the same subject in precise form. Under the problems of the guillotine, we wanted to have as general a debate as possible on the proposed English grant system.

In one and three quarters hours of this long five-day report stage, we are dealing with no less than 50 per cent. of local government revenue in England. That amounts to some £14 billion or £15 billion, give or take the odd £100 million in case I am accused of getting the figures wrong. That is an enormous sum of money and we are dealing with the way in which that is to be distributed by the Government.

8.15 pm

The Government have produced some Yellow Papers. One of those papers was on the new grant system. It is worth informing the House of what the Government said. I will not read out all the proposals but the idea that the new system will be simpler is a main feature, as is the fact that the method of distributing the grant will be more stable from year to year and that there will be full compensation for differences between areas so that local services can be provided on a common basis. In Committee the Minister constantly referred to a standard level of service. I know that some of the proposals in the documents have now changed but I understand that the grant will not be split between tiers of authority.

At one time in Committee, we dealt with a model poll tax form. It was mesmerising in its complexity and that is how it will be seen by the poll tax payers and the electorate. We look forward to the modifications and greater sophistication that will be put into that form and the proposals so that people can see the connection between the grant that the Government allow to local government, the effect of the business rate and the way in which those two figures will be manipulated in order to cause tremendous damage to the poll tax payments that citizens will have to make.

The Bill says nothing about how the grant system will operate. It says nothing about the arrangements for distribution of the massive sum of £14 billion or £15 billion. It simply sets out procedures for payment. The Department of the Environment has been dragged to court so often by local authorities to get the judges to review ministerial decisions that one might think that the Bill has been drafted without information about the arrangements for distribution or about how the grant system will operate so as to make the idea of a judicial review a non-starter. If that is the case, we are heading for real problems in local government.

The absence of detail is of major concern to all sections of local government, of whatever political complexion. One of the Yellow Papers sent out in the months before our debates dealt with the way in which a system might work. However, the powers that the Secretary of State is taking in the Bill will enable him to cobble together any system he chooses. That causes a problem for the House because we will not be able to hold Ministers truly accountable. The number of clauses, subsections and paragraphs of the Bill enabling the Secretary of State to do things as he sees fit ought to make one's hair curl. It will if one cares about parliamentary democracy and holding Ministers to account in a free and democratic Parliament, which will be extremely difficult given the way that the Bill is drafted.

One of the key points made by Ministers—I have heard it often in interviews on radio and television—when they have been explaining the poll tax is that it is only a quarter of the money. All the other money comes from progressive taxation. I am not going to go into arguments about whether it is progressive; it is slightly progressive. The broad general figures are that half comes in Government grants and a quarter comes from the business sector. So that is a quarter, a quarter and a half.

At the moment, of course, Government grants do not represent one half of local authority spending. I do not want to open up a fresh debate, but simply to put this on the record. In 1980-81, Government grants were 61 per cent. of local government spending. In 1988-89, the current year, they are 46 per cent. There is no need for the Minister to make a speech saying that I have missed out a decimal point, because I am using round figures. It is 46 per cent. —that is, less than one half.

If the grant to local government had been kept at the level it was at when the Government came to power, 61 per cent., it would this year, in cash terms, be some £4·4 billion higher. Put in terms that we can all understand, it is a poll tax of £122. That is the effect of the Government's

manipulation of what we can call rate support grant, or the new revenue support grant. It is useful to keep the initials the same, if only for those who want to use the jargon and initials all the time, which I try not to do. At any rate, it is the RSG, the amount of grant that the Government pay.

If the poll tax system had been in operation when this Government came to power, leaving aside all other changes in local government expenditure, changes in the business rate and what have you, poll tax payers today would be able to say that £122 of their poll tax was additional poll tax solely because the Government had cut the grants to local government from 61 per cent. to 46 per cent. That is the effect of what has happened since the Government came to power.

It might seem that we are looking at something that is very technical—Government grants—as though the Government were doing a favour to local government and paying out a lot of money. But it is the way that that is paid out and the proportion of the total amount that is important. A slight variation in that by the Government could have disastrous effects on the amount of poll tax that individuals will be required to pay. I will come back to some of the weird ways in which that can work in a moment.

To paraphrase amendment No. 173, this simply requires the Secretary of State, before setting the amount of revenue support grant to be made available, to take account of the likely level of expenditure to be incurred by local authorities. This means, of course, that we would like the Secretary of State to think about it beforehand, and that the House and local government should be able to share his—or, after the reshuffle, presumably, her—thoughts.

It is tempting to believe that the Government do not wish to forecast the likely levels of local authority expenditure in the chargeable financial year in order to conceal the link between Government grant and the levels of poll tax. Quite clearly, the Government are not going to make a big thing of this connection when they want to change the levels of grant. If they did so it would show that the Government are keeping authorities' needs assessments artificially low by what is called the unallocated margin—that is, the gap between the needs assessment and the public expenditure provision. Secondly, it would conceal the reductions in the grant support, which I have just touched on. So the specific purpose of amendment No. 173 is to get the Secretary of State to take account of likely levels of expenditure.

Amendment No. 156 has a slightly different purpose. It requires the Secretary of State to carry out some consultation on the basis on which he proposes to distribute the grant. The amendment would change the guidelines that are in the Bill and make them mandatory for the new needs assessments. The guidelines, briefly, relate to consultation and common principles for all authorities having regard to their functions, because county councils have different functions from district councils, the metropolitan districts are different from ordinary districts, and there are other councils, such as parish councils. And there would be specification of the principles adopted in the distribution report to the House.

The existing subsections (1) and (2) in the Bill, which would be replaced by amendment No. 156, would allow the Secretary of State to prepare a distribution report without consultation and to produce a report which described only the outline of the method of grant distribution without being clear as to the principles by which the relative needs of authorities have been assessed. This is a crucial aspect, because the needs assessments of local authorities are not scientifically precise and are definitely not politcally neutral tools. To treat them as such is to deny the possibility that local councils may have genuine differences with central Government over the level of local needs.

I do not want, and I do not think that any of my hon. Friends want, all local councils to be the same. The purpose of local government is variety and choice. I would like the Minister, even though he has to use the term "the standard level of service", to share with us some of his thoughts about local government and variety. He has not done that since his appointment. If only he would say that there ought to be differences between local councils at the same level that would be helpful. I am talking about the same kind of councils, because a district council in Cornwall will operate differently and have different needs and maybe different priorities from a district council in Cumbria. We do not want all councils to be the same. If we did, we might just as well scrub the whole idea and leave it all to Whitehall. We know that that is the natural progression of this Bill, but we do not start from the same premise as the Minister and we do not want them all to be the same.

We dealt with the needs assessment aspect in Committee and I make no apology for coming back to it on Report. It is important what factors are taken into account. We understand that the system will be simpler. That is what was said in the Yellow Paper. Any system that is simple will by definition be fairly crude. When dealing with such a large sum of money and a population the size this country's is, it is inevitable. We understand from the question and answer section of the Conservative research department document "Politics Today", edition No. 11, produced last August—and I do not think that the position has changed—that

> "The needs assessment calculated for each local authority area would follow similar principles to those used for the Grant Related Expenditure Assessments (GRE's) under block grant, but would be considerably simplified. Only six criteria will be employed."

That is, there would be only six criteria for all the kinds of work that local government has to do.

We spent some time in Committee on one of the possible criteria—at least, we assume that it is a possible criteria—that of population. How is the population of each local authority to be measured? Will it be the census figures provided by the census office and updated from time to time by the Registrar General? Will it be taken from the poll tax register? One point is crucial: will it be the day-time as opposed to the night-time population? The day-time population of the local authority area in which the House is situated is considerably more than the night-time population. The hundreds of thousands who travel to work in the Westminster area mean that the local authority has to provide services which must be taken into account. At some time during the passage of the Bill we would like a statement about how the population will be counted. It is crucial not just for the needs element but because of the previous debate. I apologise to hon. Members because that was the only debate that I missed from start to finish.

8.30 pm

Mr. Butterfill: The hon. Gentleman will recall that in Committee we said that there was a problem for local authorities in holiday areas where the summer population was much larger than the winter population. The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) also made that point. It is a serious point.

Mr. Rooker: The hon. Gentleman is right. The next one on my list was the seasonal population. It is a crucial element.

The Government have to make up their mind. I presume that this will not be kept as a mystery until the last minute. Local government needs to know. The people who make the plans need to know. The proposal is that a year from now, after the House has dealt with umpteen sets of regulations, the register for England will start the process, and two years from now, assuming that the Bill goes through, the people of England will be paying poll tax. The budgets will have been calculated. Local government budgets are not fixed at a few hours', a few days' or a few weeks' notice. They are fixed months in advance. Therefore, it is crucial to know how the population will be counted.

At the second or third sitting in Committee I asked the Minister about this and he answered in the classic ministerial phrase. I think his words were, "It is under active consideration." The Committee stage started in January and that was said at the second or third sitting. As it is nearly the end of April, I think we are owed an answer on the population aspect.

Mr. Wigley: I well remember the numerous debates we had in Committee. Does the hon. Gentleman recall the difficulty we had in getting an indication of the Government's thinking, not just on the seasonal population but on the population in relation to caravans? I welcome the changes which the Government have made about caravans. Nevertheless, the Government must ensure that local authorities have grants to meet the additional cost associated with caravans or that part of the population formula ensures that adequate resources are available.

Mr. Rooker: That is a crucial point. It is obvious that all the points that should be made cannot be made before 10 o'clock. I shall make just one further point before I finish because many hon. Members, some of whom have not spoken this week, are keen to make a contribution.

My final point relates to the gearing effect which, I presume, was raised in the previous debate. If the population does not learn anything about local government expenditure, it will soon know what the gearing effect means. I attempted to explain it—inadequately, I suspect—at a public meeting in my constituency last Sunday afternoon. I am pleased that my constituents got the message about the effect of the manipulation of the Government grant on the poll tax. We have been told that a 1 per cent. shift in one part of the calculation may require them to pay 4 per cent. more in poll tax. I am using round figures.

If a local authority wishes to spend 1 per cent. more than the Government say it should, and the Government hold level the grant and the business rate, then to collect that 1 per cent., the local authority will have to add 4 per cent. to the poll tax.

Mr. Leigh: It sounds like a good idea.

Mr. Rooker: The hon. Gentleman says that it sounds like a good idea. It is designed to make sure that people scream at councils, "The gearing, watch the gearing." It will become a slogan during elections—"Don't gear us up." That will be the phrase that will be used. *[Interruption.]* The Minister says that that is a good one. It would be all right if it applied equally all over the country and there was logicality about it, but there is not.

A 1 per cent. change in one part of the calculation will mean a 4 per cent. increase in poll tax on average, or so we have been told. It does not work out like that. In a written answer, the Minister said:

"It is also the case that for each local authority there should be a 1 per cent. increase in its gross charge for each 1 per cent. increase in its expenditure." [*Official Report*, 21 October 1987; Vol. 120, *c. 819.*]

I may be wrong but the range seems to go from 2·1 per cent. to 4·5 per cent. However, it does not work like that. The use of percentages for gearing is misleading. We need to use cash.

The purpose of the Government's test of accountability is that a £1 per head increase in expenditure results in a £1 increase in poll tax. That is not a percentage but money. I want to give examples of what happens in money terms for three local authorities. I shall have to stick to my text because this is technical. The gearing effect will result in a given percentage increase in expenditure having a different proportionate affect on the poll tax in different authorities. So the same percentage increase in total expenditure will not necessarily have the same percentage effect on the poll tax.

For example, if Islington spent at a level of 10 per cent. above its grant-related expenditure, it would be required to levy a poll tax 66 per cent. above that necessary for sticking to its grant-related expenditure. The London borough of Sutton, on the other hand, for spending at 10 per cent. above its grant-related expenditure, would need to levy a poll tax only 37 per cent. higher. In Reigate and Banstead the poll tax would be only 29 per cent. higher.

It is the level of service provided in relation to the needs assessment which should be the crucial factor in establishing accountability, not a simple £1 per head measure. In the examples I have quoted, none of the authorities can be said to be providing a higher level of service to the community. The needs of each authority as measured by needs assessment per head will differ. They will all be spending 10 per cent. above the Government's fixed level but the gearing effect on the poll tax will vary not by 1 per cent. to 4 per cent. but by 1 per cent. to 6·6 per cent.

Where is the accountability in that? Where is the communality of purpose and accountability in the gearing effect? The system will be more mysterious and more unfair and will have a disastrous effect on the conduct of local government. People will be bewildered and it will not take them long to begin to say, "Watch the gearing effect." The Minister may think that they will say that to their councillors at election time, but they will not. As they walk to the ballot boxes they will advise their fellow citizens to watch the way in which the Government have manipulated their council's spending and needs and grant. That manipulation will have forced up their council's poll tax unnecessarily.

If ever there was an example of the need for this Chamber to have a screen with a little laser gun—

something more sophisticated than an overhead projector—this is it. We need one to show what happens with the gearing effect. It will not take more than three or four years of the operation of this system under this Government for the poll tax payments under most local authorities to spin out of control exponentially up through the roof into the stratosphere—and all because of small Government manipulations of the grant and the business rate and their consequent effect, through the gearing mechanism, on the poll tax. They will bring total discredit to the Government and the system that they are introducing.

The Government cannot say that we did not warn them. We have done so every day this week and will go on doing so until next Monday evening. If Conservative Members have any sense—many of them have a private sense of foreboding—they will join us in the Lobby next Monday and chuck out this Bill. That is the only way in which to force the Government to think again. I cannot adequately emphasise the effects of the manipulations of the Government system. We may fail to convince Ministers, but they will reap the consequences.

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): Having supported the Government with enthusiasm in the last Division, I must tell my hon. and learned Friend that we have reached another part of the Bill about which I have some doubts.

The Government are staking everything on accountability. Time and again it has been maintained that under the new system everyone who gets a bill for more than the national average will know that the reason is the extravagance or inefficiency of his or her council. The Prime Minister has referred to that as the ready reckoner. The theory is that if a person lives in an area in which the standard community charge is above the national average, he can exact retribution from his local authority through the ballot box.

However, the whole principle is credible only if the Government get the grant system right. The community charge, as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) has just said, will raise only one quarter of the sum to be spent. The other three quarters is accounted for by the Government, and that money will be distributed according to some formula. The Government claim that it will be so accurate that each local authority will have to raise only a standard community charge to deliver a standard level of service.

Any Minister who has been in the Department of the Environment knows that this is moonshine. No one has ever been able to devise a grant regime that accurately reflects the different needs of each local authority. The present regime takes into account about 60 factors—the number of schoolchildren, the number of road miles and so on—and it is for ever being criticised. Every hon. Member can find a reason why the present regime does not do justice to the constituents he represents.

Some hon. Members represent areas that have a growing population and can argue that the grant is based on historic population figures that are out of date. Some areas were far more badly affected by the storms of last October than others. Some have coastal erosion. Some have a big tourist population, which puts pressure on their expenditure. Some have buildings built of PRC, which costs a lot to put right. Others have a housing stock which, although relatively new, entails much expenditure. Some may have a wholly different debt position. So the argument that No. 2 Marsham street can look at all local authorities and get the grant figure right so that the authorities have only to level the standard community charge is nonsense, and anyone who has ever been in that Department knows it.

8.45 pm

The new system will be less fair than the old. Fewer factors will be taken into account under it. At one stage, it was said that there would be only six. I understand that that claim has been withdrawn and the figure will be higher. This is being done because, in theory, the system will be simpler, but local authorities will only too easily be able to claim that their charge is above average because the Government have withdrawn recognition of some pressing local problem.

At present, one can just about tolerate an unfair grant regime, for a number of reasons. If the Government get it wrong, the consequences are borne at present not only by the domestic ratepayer but by the business community. Secondly, until relatively recently, the poor were insulated against the consequences of the Government getting it wrong because they did not pay rates. The third reason why the present system is more defensible is that what was paid bore some relation—not an exact one—to ability to pay, because it was based on rateable values.

Under the new regime, these three arguments no longer apply. The consequences of error will be far more serious and the likelihood of error greater. We have heard about the gearing ratio from the hon. Member for Perry Barr. For every 1 per cent. that the Government get it wrong, the local community will have to pay 4 per cent. more. There will not be a contribution from the business community if the Government's grant regime is incorrect.

Then there will be the inequity of distribution among poll tax payers because everyone will have to pay the same and there will not be the relatively progressive system that there is now. To use a metaphor, there will be more potholes in the road and the car will have fewer springs. The notion that there will be accountability is wrong, because for the first four years the transitional arrangements will exist. Some poll tax payers will have to pay an extra £75 in year one. From years one to four no one will be able to say that his poll tax bears any relationship to his local authority's expenditure because of the transitional provisions. So in the very years when people form their opinion of the new regime, accountability will not be working.

To find an example of why the Government will have to change the grant regime from one year to the next, I have only to look at my local authority. Last July, it was announced that Ealing council would be rate-capped. That was absolutely right—it was a grossly extravagant authority. The Government came up with a figure that they thought the local authority should spend this year. It implied a reduction in the rates of 44 per cent. We were all looking forward to that sort of reduction, but in February, when the figure was fixed, the Department of the Environment announced that it had new information that was more up to date, and the rates were only going to fall by 23·4 per cent. That was a major change in central Government's perception of what a local authority needed. If that sort of change is possible within a few months, it is perfectly possible that the same magnitude of error can occur in future under the new grant regime.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): In the argument about extravagance, in some ways a good case has been weakened by not conceding that many of local authorities' problems have been due to the changes in the rate support grant over the years. In my county, £53 million has been deducted since 1979 in changes in the rate support grant. That has added 52p in the pound to the average rateable value, which means that Humberside ratepayers pay £78 more a year under the Government changes than they should. The same danger exists with the new system. That was illustrated by the hon. Gentleman's point, but he should concede that the Government have played a role in forcing up rates and there is a danger that they will do the same under this system.

Sir George Young: I may have saved the hon. Gentleman from making a constituency speech later on.

My point is that, under the new regime, every hon. Member will be able to make the sort of contribution that the hon. Gentleman has just made and produce plausible reasons why the Government's grant regime has discriminated against his or her local authority. Local councillors will also be able to make that point. Therefore, the argument that the poll tax payer will believe the Government when they say that they have got the grant spot on and that the local authority is over the top because it is extravagant, will be negated at the local level, probably by the Member of Parliament, of whatever party, and almost certainly by local councillors and officers.

Because there will be good examples of where the Government have got it wrong, the credibility of their case will be shattered. For that reason, if there is a Division at 10 o'clock, I shall be supporting the amendment. The Government's case cannot be maintained unless the grant regime is right and the grant regime will not be right. The amendments try to sketch in some of the detail and we are entitled to that information.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): The level of the poll tax is sensitive to the Government's decisions on grant. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) explained, had the level of rate support grant been maintained at its 1981 level of 61 per cent., grant in 1988-89 would have been £4·4 billion extra. He told us that that was equivalent to a poll tax of £122. Instead, over the past eight years, the rate support grant has been constantly reduced until it is now only 46 per cent. The limited point that I want to make about that is that Government grant is unlikely to cover the extra cost of collecting the poll tax or to recognise the extent of the inevitable evasion.

Using the London borough of Newham as an example, I want to show what a costly administrative nightmare collecting this ugly and unfair tax will be. There will be major public disquiet over the large number of Newham residents who will have to pay more under the poll tax. At 1987-88 expenditure levels, the poll tax would be set at a level £309 per person. The average rates bill per household is currently £518. Therefore, some 88 per cent. of the population of Newham will have to pay more.

About 45 per cent. of Newham adults live in households with two adults and will have to pay about 19 per cent. extra. But the main concern is for the 68,000 adults—43 per cent. of the borough's adult population—who live in households with three or more adults who will suddenly be faced with considerably larger bills.

Newham has a particularly high proportion of large households. Over 27,000 adults—over 17 per cent. of the borough's adult population—live in households of five or more adults. The majority of those large households comprise people of ethnic minority origin. In many cases, they have decided to live in extended families to ease the cost of buying a house. We learn that from building societies such as the Halifax.

A six-adult household would have its rates increased from an average charge of £518 to a poll tax of £1,854. An ordinary four-adult household—say, a middle-aged couple with children aged 18 and 20—will have an immediate 139 per cent. increase imposed on them, a rise from £518 per annum to £1,236 per annum. The poll tax will hit hardest those who live in larger households. In Newham, that means mainly people of ethnic minority origin.

Mr. Leigh *rose*——

Mr. Leighton: Time is short, so I shall not give way on this occasion, but I look forward to hearing the hon. Gentleman's speech.

A major part of the nightmare will be the compilation of the register. Currently in Newham, only 70 per cent. of those eligible are on the electoral register. How many of those not on the electoral register will voluntarily register for the poll tax? Who will track them down? The attempt to compile such a register will involve regular canvasses, inspections, information from other authorities and council departments and from other computer systems. That will be extremely complex and onerous and will need a large army of newly employed council snoopers.

It will be necessary to know how many beds there are in each house and who is sleeping in them. There is a high degree of mobility among the local population. We know that from the annual turnover on the electoral register. Some younger people may move four or five times a year. It will be difficult to establish who is resident and to ascertain responsibility for registration where there are joint or multiple tenancies. The whole exercise will involve a distasteful and massive invasion of privacy.

It has been estimated that anything up to 15 per cent. of people will not register in order to evade the charge. That will load extra burdens on those who do pay. Will that be recognised by the level of Government grant? I think that we all know the answer to that.

One certain effect of the Bill will be the huge extra cost of the vast increase in staff that will be needed to produce the register, to collect the tax and to recover debts. As all eligible adults will have to pay the tax, there will be a huge increase in the number of accounts. At the moment, Newham has 57,000 rate accounts. That will increase to 163,000 poll tax and uniform business rate accounts. That is because of the change from houses to people as a base for the tax, and because council tenants will not be able to include poll tax payments in their rent.

However, matters will be much worse because all payers must be given instalment facilities. In addition, each person must be sent a personal bill. That will increase the number of payment transactions in Newham to between 350,000 and 1·5 million. In other words, there will be an enormous increase in paperwork.

The council estimates that the number of summonses issued for non-payment will increase from 8,000 to 35,000. There will also be a requirement to collect fines from those

who fail to register. That will do a great deal of damage to the council's relations with the public. Extra accounts, valuation, inspection, control, recovery and register staff will be needed. Altogether the council bureaucracy will have to be increased by 160 staff. Apart from the cost, there will be difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified staff with local authorities competing for qualified people. In addition, there will be a need for more computer systems, both hardware and software. At the moment the town hall is bursting at the seams, but extra accommodation will be required.

How much extra will that cost? Quite apart from the cost of evasion, the cost to Newham of the extra staff, accommodation, computer hardware and software, training and other overheads is put at £2·75 million. That is a heavy and needless burden in order to collect not more, but almost certainly less, revenue.

Not only is this a grossly unfair tax, it is extremely inefficient and expensive to collect. I ask, without much hope of succeeding, for extra grant to cover those costs.

9 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): This is the first time that I have spoken during the Report stage of this very important Bill. It is not that the many hon. Members who have not spoken are not interested in the Bill, but unfortunately, due to the method and system of this House called the guillotine, meaningful debate is not now possible. Many amendments tabled in good faith by hon. Members on both sides of the House do not have the benefit of considered and sensible debate, and I deeply regret that.

I listened with great interest to the opening speech of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) and I found myself in great sympathy with him. Sadly, I do not think that I can vote for his amendments, but I shall certainly not vote against them, because there is good sense in the hon. Gentleman's argument. Furthermore, irrespective of the precise size of the majority, what happens in this place will be a signal to the other place, which has a valuable role to play in determining the form of the Bill as it eventually reaches the statute book.

I speak particularly in the interests of the small councils, which are seldom represented in this place—although the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) will, I hope, contribute to the debate and add to my argument. My concern is with the position in which parish, town and community councils will find themselves—a subject that is very relevant. Given that we are discussing amendments to clauses dealing with revenue support grants and distribution reports on that money, it is important that the position of the small council should be fully understood.

I know that my hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Local Government is well aware that at present the whole expenditure of a parish or community council is financed by a rate levied on all properties in its area, domestic and non-domestic alike. However, under the Government's new system, the expenditure of the councils would be met out of what is known as the "collection fund" maintained by the district or borough council. Payments would also go out of that fund to the county and district and borough councils. In England, into that fund would go all the community charges and the share for the area of the national non-domestic rates and the Government grant to local authorities. In Wales, into that fund would go all the community charges. No doubt the hon. Member for Caernarfon will refer to Wales specifically.

To complaints that parish councils will no longer share in non-domestic rates, the Government reply that they will, because the fund out of which their expenditure is met is composed of the three elements of charge, non-domestic rate and grant from central Government. Parish councils, however, do not see how that has any effect on their position, because they foresee the whole of their expenditure having in the end to be met out of the community charge for their parish.

Let me cite a straightforward and simple example. In a parish—parish A—there is no significant parish expenditure. Let us estimate that the charge for parish purposes is £1 per person. The district charge is £200 per person and the county charge is £400. The non-domestic rate returned and Government grant together amount to £300 per person. Subtract £300 from £601 and one is left with £301.

Parish B, a neighbouring parish in the same county—it could be Cheshire—incurs considerable expenditure, thereby incidentally reducing district expenditure, so let us estimate that the charge for parish purposes is £20 per person. Worked out on the same formula as parish A, the total net charge per person in parish B is £320. Thus, the whole of the parish council expenditure—not only the extra, above the amount expected by the Government to be proper for the area—falls on to the community charge. This matter is very relevant to the amendments, and it is appropriate that we should discuss it now.

To complaints that community councils have no share in the non-domestic rate, the Government say that they should not expect to have such a share because their activities are essentially what the Government describe as "person-related"—they provide playing fields, for example—and the councils should not expect businesses to pay for such expenditures. In any case, the community councils are in the same position as the parishes in the example that I cited.

I have been in local government myself and have long taken an interest in it. To me, the provisions show ignorance on the part of Ministers of precisely what is happening in local government and of the roles and functions of its various levels. If to all intents and purposes the Government want to do away with local government, they should tell us that that is what they want and let us debate it. If they want meaningful local government, they must not carry on as they are doing. I say that with some experience of local government.

Parish and community councils fear that a massive rise in payments from community charge payers will be needed to cover long-running existing expenditure. The problem is especially acute in places where there are loans outstanding or with small populations. In many places, non-domestic property accounts for more than half the rateable value in a community, parish or town council. In one area in the south of England, the rateable property value is 95 per cent.

Parish and community councils have good spokesmen in both Houses of Parliament but, unfortunately, they are not always heeded. I repeat that I do not think that the benefits of parish, community and town councils are

[Mr. Nicholas Winterton]

always understood by Government. I know that in my constituency they are well appreciated and understood by the electors whom I have the honour to represent.

Parish and community councils do not see why they should not share in the money that is paid from the centre to support local government when all their functions are the same as those dischargeable by district councils, which will get such support from central Government by way of the contribution under the new system. It is said that central Government's contribution will be 75 per cent. but it is likely to be closer to 77 per cent. of the cost of local government. Central Government have a major role to play and should recognise the important role of councils down to the lowest level.

A long-term result of what my hon. and learned Friend the Minister proposes might be a reduction in cheap, effective parochial activities and a transfer of those activities to district or borough councils with their generally higher overheads. Inevitably, that will bring higher costs to the ratepayers or community charge payers, and I suspect that in the long term it will also bring higher costs to business.

Perhaps my speech will be more relevant in the House at a later time than it will be now in changing the mind and the views of my hon. and learned Friend the Minister, for whom I have immense regard and respect. I am sure that it is possible to devise a reasonably simple method by which parish and community councils can be assured by law of a proportionate share in the non-domestic rate. They are not guaranteed such a share in the legislation that we are debating and which will shortly pass to another place.

Town, parish and community councillors are the unsung heroes of local government. Those councillors do not claim the grand allowances and responsibility allowances that are costing ratepayers so much. I served in local government at a time when councillors received very modest subsistence and mileage allowances. I never received the huge allowances that make council work for many of today's councillors a full-time occupation. However, I am not arguing that matter in this debate.

My hon. and learned Friend the Minister has promised to visit my constituency towards the end of the year. He will receive a courteous and friendly welcome from many people. I plead with him to appreciate the valuable role that is played in local government by local town, parish and community councils. We would be worse off if they disappeared.

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): I support the remarks of the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). For many hours in Committee, hon. Members on both sides of the Committee and I were very much inclined to the hon. Gentleman's point of view that community councils in Wales and parish councils in England fulfil an extremely valuable function and that, by taking the non-domestic rate away from those local authorites, they will have to rely entirely upon the community charge for their income.

In my constituency, that will mean a loss of no less than 60 per cent. of the income of community councils and in some areas the ironic situation will arise in which the community councils will have to precept a higher poll tax than the district councils which have a much greater area of responsibility. If the Minister will not listen to Opposition Members, I hope that he will listen to Conservative Members and take those matters into consideration.

I wish to refer to the effects of the changes in the grant system on the Principality of Wales. We have our own Secretary of State, and occasionally the Under-Secretary of State for Wales is present to discuss matters, although he is not here this evening. I know that the Minister, as a Llanelli boy, will undoubtedly answer some of the points that I intend to raise about Wales.

There is a separate system in Wales. The grant will be paid separately to districts and counties, whereas in England it will go only to the districts. We were told that the system in Wales would be different from that in England because the local authorities in the Principality were reasonable ones. They had never been profligate. According to the Welsh Office, they had been responsible, ideal local councils.

The reward for the good work of those councils in the past eight years has been an increasingly complex grant system which gave them ever-decreasing amounts of grant. If, as the amendment suggests, the new grant system will bring simplicity, it will also unfortunately bring unfairness because it relies on the crudest possible factors.

In Wales especially, those factors are insufficient to mitigate the worst effects of the tax. Undoubtedly, matters such as unemployment, low wages and the number of low-cost terraced houses, which have been up for almost a century in the Welsh valleys, have to be taken into account when the needs element of the grant is distributed in the principality. In Wales, the average wage for a manual worker is £204 a week, which is £20 below the British average and £50 below that in the south-east. White-collar workers earn under half what their counterparts earn in London.

We must take those factors into account and add to them the fact that, of the 37 districts in Wales, 25 will be worse off as a consequence of the poll tax. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Bar (Mr. Rooker) referred to the gearing effect. It will have a great significance because, in Wales, for every 1 per cent. increase in local authority expenditure there will be over a 6 per cent. increase in the poll tax for those communities.

The Minister knows that the rateable values in the south Wales valleys are much lower than elsewhere—not only in the Principality, but in the whole United Kingdom. There are 250,000 homes with rateable values of less than £75 a year and 175,000 homes with rateable values of between £75 and £100. Because of those low rateable values, and assuming that local authorities remain responsible and their expenditure remains the same, a household of one adult will have to pay an increase in cost of 10 per cent., a household with two adults an increase of 119 per cent., a household of three adults an increase of 229 per cent. and a household of four adults an increase of 339 per cent. The only way in which we can mitigate those worst effects is by ensuring that the grants in the Principality are geared to take account of those disparities, so that the wild variations that result will disappear.

9.15 pm

Let us look at certain local authorities. The Rhondda, by any measure of deprivation, has to be regarded as the worst example for unemployment, low pay and bad housing. In that area, a household of two will have to pay no less than £158 a year in poll tax. The same is true of all

the other south Wales valleys—for example Merthyr and Cynon. Other local authorities are much better off, although their rateable values are higher. The contrast is considerable in Cardiff, where the local authority may have to start paying £2 a year back to people, so they will be paying nothing in poll tax. Those massive variations can occur because, as a result of these changes, the resources element in the grant has gone.

The Government can do something about this. Ministers have said that they will look at the question, and they must do so and take into account the views of the district and county councils and all political parties in Wales. Some 70 per cent. or more of the Welsh people last year rejected an unwelcome tax. This phrase may be trite, but it bears a warning—the poor will get poorer and the rich will get richer as a result of this tax. That phrase will echo throughout the valleys of south Wales.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): When I came here for the for first time last June, I thought that my direct interest in the grant system was gone for ever, because the borough council and part of the county council that I represent are out of grant because of Heathrow airport. However, the national non-domestic rate changes will put paid to that, and bring both my borough and county councils back within the system, so I have had to put on my thinking cap and decide whether I support these proposals. Before my hon. and learned Friend the Minister gets worried, I assure him that I support the proposals, and I do so without having had my arm twisted, and for reasons I shall develop.

Before I do so, I shall touch on the points raised by the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton)—I am sorry that he is not here now. I took him to be making a plea for more grants, so that his local newspapers could report it, but he told us only half the story. Perhaps I and others would have some sympathy for it if Newham council would put its house in order first and ask for help afterwards. I can give three examples of what is going wrong in Newham so that we can judge properly whether it needs more money or needs to sort itself out.

The *Evening Standard* on 7 August last year said that the ombudsman had said that Newham council had

"no effective management of modernisation of a block of council flats."

Therefore, money was being wasted. There is the ombudsman saying what happens to the grant that Newham gets. On 9 December last year, *The Guardian* reported that Newham was advertising for three jobs at £15,000 each for a policing unit when it has no police responsibility. That is another waste of the existing grant going to Newham. Even when it tries to use its money, things go wrong. On 7 September last year, the *Evening Standard* reported that Newham borough council refused to give housing improvement grants to some of its tenants because the accounts of those tenants were with Barclays bank. Let us get the whole story right if we are to have pleas for grants.

I do not need any persuasion to support these changes, because the system is useless and discredited and no one Government are to blame. When I was in local government, and particularly when I led a local authority for five years, I found the grant system incomprehensible. This was an advantage if one worked it properly, because if one asked one officer what it meant and did not like the answer, one asked another one and got a different answer. Even if one did receive an answer that one liked, it did not matter very much because either later that year, the year after or even the year after that, one might be told that everything had changed anyway.

In the end, one tended to shrug one's shoulders. If the situation did change, people would put on their thinking caps and ask, "What can we do about this crazy system?" I confess that it was not only Labour authorities who worked the system to their advantage. My own authority, like many others, decided that it should read the small print. I make no apologies because, provided one stays within the law, the law is there to work to one's advantage.

My own authority discovered that if, towards the end of March each year, it examined how much had been spent and what were the rules for grant in that particular year, it was sometimes found that lending money to the housing revenue account increased current expenditure and made the authority eligible for more grant. In other years, it was found that borrowing money from the housing revenue account reduced current expenditure, which was again a qualification for more grant. If my hon. Friend on the Front Bench is now writing all that down so that he can put paid to it, I may tell him that it has been put paid to already—otherwise I would not have reported it tonight.

The current system is incomprehensible, unpredictable and eminently abusable. The new system, despite the reservations expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) is comprehensible. If it has some elements that make it less refined, the understanding enjoyed by councillors of what they are doing will more than make up for any other deficiencies. The new system will also be predictable. Knowing how much money will be available before the year starts will, above all else, be the one factor that will make the work of local government a great deal easier. For that reason alone we must press ahead with it.

The new system will also be even-handed. I began by saying that I thought I had seen the last of the grant system so far as my own local authorities were concerned. I am glad that I have not, because when there are some authorities in grant and others out of grant, that is not even-handed. The wishes of the DOE affect some authorities more than others when that system prevails. I welcome the change so that the business rate is centralised and is calculated per head of population, and is not influenced by the fact that there happens to be a huge airport in the constituency. If the DOE can get it right, one hopes the system will also be unabusable.

Apart from commenting generally on the old and new systems, I should like to say something about Labour amendment No. 173. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) did not say very much about it. I have a feeling that I know why. In my time in politics I have learned that one must beware helpful references and plausible explanations.

I took the trouble of looking at the small print of amendment No. 173 and paragraph (i) caught my eye, which states that the Secretary of State shall take into account

"the latest information available to him as to the aggregate of all authorities' expenditure."

That sounds fair enough; to consider what is being spent and then calculate a figure accordingly. However, if I understand that wording correctly it means taking into account authorities such as Camden, which is 50 per cent. overspent, and Greenwich, which is 41 per cent. overspent,

[Mr. David Wilshire]

and persuading the Secretary of State to stoke up, compound and multiply their overspending of previous years in deciding his grant. If that is what amendment No. 173 means, the quicker it is voted down the better.

Paragraph (iii) states that the Secretary of State shall take into account

"the need for developing those services and the extent to which, having regard to general economic conditions, it is reasonable to develop them."

That provision also sounds fair enough, and straightforward, if one reads over it quickly. However, the Labour Front Bench offered no definition of "services" or "developing"—or of who is to judge what is the state of the national economy. If experience is anything to go by, that will be a Labour definition, to the advantage of local government and the lunatics within the Labour party in local government. I suspect that the amendment means more of this kind of developing service. Brent will sponsor more graffiti classes; Ealing will employ more animal rights officers; Haringey will run more training courses for women bricklayers.

I need no persuasion. I rejoice that the current system is on its way out, and I welcome a new system that will be simple, predictable and even-handed.

I shall vote enthusiastically against the Labour amendments. I will not be taken in—as I hope that the House will not—by their plausible line, which conceals gross overspending and waste in Labour authorities, major manipulation by them of the current grant system and a scandalous abuse of other people's money. The aim is to undermine our society and further the revolution, and I am against that.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) surprised no one when he said that he would support the Government. He also surprised no one with his usual argument that crude over-simplification was the way out. If he had listened properly to the debate—and, indeed, to the contributions of his hon. Friends who spoke before him—the hon. Gentleman would have recognised the strength of arguments which, even if they did not convince him, should at least have given him cause for reasonable doubt about whether the system proposed by his Government will be an improvement rather than a considerable disimprovement.

I agree that the present system cannot be supported, and that it can be validly criticised. But the way forward is to ensure that the system that replaces it is agreed with those who have to practise it: that those people are consulted, and use their expertise and practical implementation as partners in deciding on the system.

Of course I accept that central Government will decide the total amount. Thereafter, however, there should be consultation. The amendment in my name, and one of the Labour amendments, argue that there should be not only notification but consultation—that people in local government should be partners in deciding on the process of distributing whatever central Government gives out from taxpayers' resources. We shall never have a satisfactory system of allocating funds until the decision on who gets what is made jointly by the two of them, central Government and local government, and both have available to them—in a tripartite forum—the services of independent assessors and financial experts, who can advise them on the implications of the options that are proposed.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) made a valid point about gearing. The proposed system will not do what the Minister wanted his system to do: it will not render local government more accountable in that, when local government puts up the cost of its services in a given area, the poll tax will go up by the same amount. It is now obvious from a survey by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy that in not one local authority in England and Wales will the percentage increase in services, and in the cost of those services, be reflected by the same percentage increase in poll tax. Indeed, in some instances, the local authority will spend more in a year, and the poll tax will go down. That is hardly the accountable system that the Government have sought.

If pushed to a vote, I shall support the amendment. Because of the guillotine, I shall not be able to force a vote on my amendment. It is not perfect either, but it allows the system to take into account many more factors than the few crude factors in the system proposed by the Government. One of the concerns of those interested in local Government should be the extraordinary crudity of the proposed new system.

I have pointed out that local government will be carved out of the working out of grant distribution and will only be notified of the report. Two revisions will be possible in any one year—the calculations and additional grant. The additional grant will not, however, take account of massively increased take-up of housing benefit in a particular local authority area and other such unpredictable factors. It may allow for compensation for a hurricane, or something like that, but not for many practical matters.

9.30 pm

As for the transitional arrangements, which will have horrendous implications in terms of administration and practicability, the Government will be able to make such assumptions and estimates as they see fit. Even if information is sought in other cases from local government, the Government will be able to proceed without it, or with information that they have no obligation to test for accuracy. There will be enormous additional centralised power.

A system which is sophisticated need not be, by definition, incomprehensible. Part of the present system is certainly that and we could improve on it, but we need not go to the other extreme. The problem with the whole of the proposed assessment is that the needs of all the local authorities—all of which have an enormous number of different components—will not be taken into account. As the hon. Member for Perry Barr said, once one gets the basic assessment wrong, the gearing effect compounds the injustice and inequality. The Government could have learned from the mistakes of the past, but they have not.

I endorse, without elaborating, the points made by the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). Over Easter I went away for a few days and called on my family who live in Herefordshire. My mother is chair of the parish council in a small village which has seven people on the parish council. Those people are alarmed about how they and their colleagues on other parish councils will be able to do their job at that important level of local government.

That common concern has not been allayed by the Government's responses so far. In London we do not even have parish councils—would that we did—but parish, community and town councils deserve to have their voices heard. The hon. Member for Macclesfield made a good case to which I hope the Government will listen.

I should like to reflect the general tenor of the points made by the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton). There will be enormous administrative costs. We are not told how much the grant will reflect them. We could quibble about some of the figures. In a press release issued by the Department of the Environment on 13 April, the Government are said to have made a capital allocation of £25 million to help local councils in preparation for the arrival of the community charge. The hon. Member for Newham, North-East talked about the particular problems in his borough. There is no doubt that the sheer number of bits of paper will be multiplied—it has nothing to do with a local council's efficiency.

In Southwark, 66 per cent. of people are council tenants, and they pay with their rents. They will have individual poll tax forms. According to the current figures, the 40,677 rate accounts will become 185,000 poll tax accounts—355 per cent. more. The number of payments are likely to increase by nearly 2,000 per cent.—a staggering number. People will have to go on to estates, where they may well be mugged or be in physical difficulty. There are rates arrears of £30 million in Southwark, and I am critical enough of the local council for that. What will be the amount when there is the new system to police—*[Interruption.]* I did not hear that comment. I do not defend Southwark's £30 million rates arrears, but that is in a system in which the money is supposed to be relatively easy to collect. This is a system whereby we shall have to chase people around the boroughs.

The costs, the needs and the realities of local government will not be reflected in the new system. I hope that central Government will learn one lesson even at this late stage, even though the Minister has shown no sign of doing so. The only way in which central Government will ever be able to have a decent relationship with local government is through a partnership and not by saying, whatever the issue, "We know best. Marsham street will tell you what to do. We shall impose our system." The Bill is about a Marsham street system instead of local government choosing its own way forward.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said that the reform would be a disimprovement on the present system. I do not know whether that is new SLD-speak, but I wish to take five minutes of the House's time before my hon. and learned Friend replies to the debate to say that I consider that the reform will be an improvement on what is without doubt a chaotic situation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) made a typically coherent speech. However, he did not mention that in 1987-88 his borough of Ealing overspent by the colossal amount of £100 per head. Of course, my hon. Friend has an advantage over me in that he was a Department of the Environment Minister. He should ask himself why he presided over a grants system that allowed Ealing to overspend by £100 per head, which allowed Ealing to return its street cleaning operation to its own work force and remove it from the private firm, with the cost of the service increasing from £900,000 a year to £1·7 million a year in 1987-88. He should ask himself why he presided over a grants system which allowed Ealing, since Labour took control in May 1986, to create 1,435 new council jobs. He should ask himself why the council is spending £16,000 a year to employ a worker with a vehicle to put up its political posters.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton), who made an effective speech, has to ask himself why Newham is spending £126 per adult above what it should be spending in 1987-88. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) said that every £1 extra per head of local authority spending might result in a considerable loss of grant. That is true. We want local authorities to be made aware of the effects of their decisions and the real costs to their citizens of decisions such as those being made in Ealing, Southwark and Bermondsey and many others. If I had sufficient time I could quote many other examples.

Lincolnshire benefits from having enjoyed Tory control for a generation under county councillors who provide effective services that people need. However, we and our colleagues in other shire areas have repeatedly been penalised by the present chaotic rate support grant system.

In Committee my hon. and learned Friend said that the present rate support grant system resembled the Schleswig-Holstein question in the last century. It was said that only three people understood it, and that of those one was dead, one had forgotten, and one had gone out of his mind. A former Secretary of State for the Environment admitted that he did not understand the present system. *[Interruption]* It was not the current Secretary of State but a previous incumbent of that office, who admitted that he did not understand the system. The present system is incomprehensible, easily abused and far too complex.

So far in the debate no one has said what the new system will do. I shall attempt to do so briefly in one paragraph. It will achieve equalisation of what people have to pay in different areas to achieve a standard rate of service. Surely that is a sensible reform. Should the House turn its back on a system which is fairer, simpler, and less complex and which will provide a level playing field that the electorate can understand? I shall vote enthusiastically for the Government's proposals.

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Michael Howard): We have had an extremely interesting and vigorous debate on this aspect of the Government's proposals. As usual, there was an interesting speech by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), but he rather overdid it when he suggested, quoting from a Central Office document, that the Government are proposing a system that relies on only six indicators. I made it plain in Committee, at column 1355, that that was a rather over-optimistic assessment. We recognised that there would need to be considerably more than six elements but considerably fewer than the 63 or so that are used in the present system. I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman how many there will be because we have not yet reached a final decision on the grant system.

The hon. Gentleman made a number of points about the effect of the system that we propose to put into place. He referred at length to the gearing effect and gave some interesting examples. But what is interesting about the Opposition's approach to gearing is that they always talk about its effect on increases in council spending. We never hear a word pass the lips of the hon. Member for Perry

[Mr. Michael Howard]

Barr about the effect of gearing on reductions in council spending—about the incentives to real economy and efficiency and to the provision of real value for money, to the benefit of residents, that the system that we shall put into place will offer.

The hon. Gentleman quoted a number of interesting examples that were based on percentages, but when people consider the effects of the spending decisions of their councils they are not concerned with percentages; they are concerned about the money that they will have to pay. The fact that a pound of additional spending will mean a pound more in community charge and that a pound less in spending will mean a pound less in community charge is something that they will readily grasp. They will see the importance of it and will understand its significance for their pockets.

In the interesting comparison that he made in percentage terms about the effect of increased spending on the London borough of Islington compared with the other boroughs to which he referred, the hon. Member for Perry Barr did not bring out the fact that the reason why an increase in spending led to a percentage increase in the community charge for Islington, compared with those other boroughs, is that Islington receives a much larger central Government grant than the other boroughs. It will no doubt continue to receive a much larger central Government grant than the other boroughs. The important point is not the percentage comparison but the fact that, under the new system, residents will know that for every pound increase in spending by their local authorities there will be a pound increase in community charge—and vice versa for reductions.

The hon. Gentleman asked me, as Minister for Local Government, to recognise the need for, and the importance of, a variety of approaches by local authorities because they are situated in different parts of the country. I readily accept that there can and that there should be differences of approach. There will be a variety of approaches, not simply because local authorities are situated in different parts of the country but because even side by side, there will be differences of approach. The importance of the system that we are putting into place is that differences of approach will reflect the democratic views of residents in local authorities. They will be based on true accountability. Residents will know that they will have to pay for extra spending but that, if their local authority pursues economic policies, they will save. That great element is missing from the present system.

9.45 pm

The one factor, above all, which will improve accountability is the comprehensibility that we shall strive to introduce into the system. The hon. Member for Perry Barr and my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) were right when they said that there will be arguments whether the local authority has had the amount of Government grant to which it contends it is entitled. It is idle to suppose that one could ever devise a system of Government grant that would eliminate such arguments.

There will always be arguments of that kind—but only if they take place against the background of a grant that people understand can we hope to get some real democracy back into local government, so that people take decisions knowing whether their council gives them value for money. They can make their own judgments on those arguments, and on the level of spending that they want to support and think appropriate. Those judgments will be based on an understanding of the situation and the performance of the councillors for whom they will be voting.

I want to say a few words about the characteristically forthright comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). I understand his concerns, but I should say at the outset that, however strongly he feels about the parish councils to which he referred, that would not afford him a reason to refuse to support the Government at 10 o'clock.

Amendment No. 156 is a Labour amendment. Despite that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) pointed out, the hon. Member for Perry Barr said precious little about it in his introductory remarks.

The amendment will do nothing at all to help ease the difficulty to which my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield referred, as it may affect parish councils under the new system. I listened with great interest to my hon. Friend; I know of his distinguished service in local government before he entered this House. I listened with particular interest to the example that he gave of two neighbouring parish councils with different spending levels, and the way in which that situation would affect the level of community charge paid by people in those parishes.

There will be a power for the district council to levy a lower community charge for the residents of a parish, where the parish is providing the service which the district council would otherwise have provided for a non-parished area. That I believe, would go a considerable way towards meeting my hon. Friend's concern. The service that the parish provides may not be a service that the district provides for unparished areas, and, indeed the parish may have a higher level of spending, as a result of extravagance or, perhaps, of a higher level of service.

I accept that my hon. Friend was right when he said that, in general, parish councils are a cheap and effective form of local government. But if a parish council is spending to provide a higher level of service than the district provides for unparished areas—I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield will reflect upon this—then it is right that in those circumstances that higher level of service should be paid for by the residents of that parish.

It is unsatisfactory that the parish should be able to offload that spending and the cost of an additional level of service to businesses that happen to be in the parish area or to non-domestic rates. That approach does not contribute to accountability. I do not think that the House would wish to support such a system.

I hope that, upon reflection, my hon. Friend will see the force of that point. Whether or not I have succeeded in persuading him, the fact remains that this matter will not be affected by the amendment that we shall vote on at 10 o'clock. Whether or not I have persuaded him on the merits, I hope that my hon. Friend may yet nevertheless join us in the Lobby.

Mr. Wigley: I failed to catch the Chair's eye earlier but I wish to make a point about community councils. Since there is strong feeling among community councils, parish councils and the organisations that work on their behalf on this point and since there are amendments tabled by the

hon. Members for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) and myself and my colleagues, if, those amendments come up in another place and the case is put coherently, will the Minister give an undertaking that the Government will have an open mind? There are real fears that the work of those councils may be undermined by the changes that are taking place.

Mr. Howard: Of course, we always have an open mind and we always listen most carefully to the points that are made in this place and in the other place and, indeed, in the course of meetings and discussions that take place in neither place. Therefore, I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance.

The hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) rather over-egged the pudding when he discussed the different ways in which the collection fund would be treated in England and Wales. He suggested that the reason for the difference was that local government in Wales had reached some ideal state that put it beyond any sort of criticism. I do not think that I ever said anything quite as complimentary as that about local government in Wales during the course of our deliberations in Committee. We justified the difference in treatment on the basis of the different history and traditions of local Government in Wales, compared with that in England.

The hon. Gentleman concluded his remarks by saying that serious problems would arise in the Welsh valleys in particular if there were not a proper reflection of different needs in the Government grant. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. We have at all times made it clear that there would continue to be an effective, proper needs element in the Government grant.

Of course we recognise that it costs different amounts of money to provide a standard level of service in different areas that have different needs. We have always made that plain. The arguments have sometimes been distorted by others but we have always made it plain that it is our intention to do that and we shall seek to have as effective a needs element in the grant as possible.

The overriding fact remains—it is at the heart of our approach to these matters—that we want and intend to introduce a grant system that is comprehensible. We believe that only against the background of a comprehensible system can we achieve true accountability. I understand why it is not necessarily in the interests of the Labour party to have a comprehensible grant system. If we have a system that cannot be readily understood and on which there cannot be any sensible argument because so few people understand the argument, accountability is clouded and goes out the window and we encourage and foster the sort of high-spending irresponsibility that we have seen time and again from local authorities controlled by the Labour party over recent years and earlier.

Because we wish to put an end to the way in which those authorities have been able to shelter behind incomprehensible grant arrangements and because we want to encourage true accountability, I commend to the House the grant arrangements presently contained in the Bill.

Mr. Rooker: With the leave of the House, I should like to make a couple of points. It has been an interesting debate. It has been a short debate, but that is necessary under the guillotine. Two Conservative Members spoke for the Government and two Back-Bench Conservative Members spoke against. There was the unjustified attack by the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on his hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), in his absence. He criticised him not for the fact that he is not supporting the Government today but because when he was a Minister in the Department of the Environment he allowed——

Mr. Wilshire *rose*——

Mr. Rooker: I will not give way. The hon. Member for Spelthorne criticised his hon. Friend for allowing his own council to overspend.—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry. I withdraw completely and utterly, with full apologies all round. I have it written down here. It was the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh). But I think that the point was made, and it was an unjustifiable attack on the hon. Member for Ealing, North——

Sir George Young: I am not the Member for Ealing, North.

Mr. Rooker: Mr. Speaker, it has been a long week. I am prepared to concede a throw-in to the Government, because we have won four-nil every day this week. The Government have not had a good week.

One of the main points in this short debate has been the question of grant distribution, because the way grants are distributed is crucial. We are talking about 50 per cent. of local government expenditure. Going back to the point that I raised originally concerning the factors on which the grant will be based, we are told that they will be fewer than at present. The Tory document issued last August from which I quoted said that there would be only six. The Minister reminded us that he conceded in Committee that there would be, not six, but fewer than the 83 that there are now, but he cannot say what the figure will be.

The hon. and learned Gentleman has also admitted, because he has not given us the answer to the question, that the Government do not even know how to count people. It is crucial that the number of people relevant to the grant distribution is known. Is it the poll tax number, the census number, the daytime number, the seasonal number? That is absolutely crucial and they still have not made up their mind during the passage of this Bill how they will count people for the grant distribution purposes of the poll tax.

As the Minister said, people will know, there will be more accountability and they will find out. Well, the people are finding out. In February this year, 45 per cent. of the people of this country thought that the poll tax was a good idea. The figure had dropped from over 60 per cent. last autumn. We had had the Second Reading and the Committee was under way. Last week 26 per cent. thought that it was a good idea. So, yes, the people are finding out about this tax. Only 48 per cent. of Tory voters now think that it is a good idea. The more people find out about the poll tax, the more convinced they are that it is a bad idea. The percentage that thinks that it is a bad idea has gone up from 39 per cent. in February to 62 per cent. while those communication whizz-kids have been dealing with the Bill in Committee. So, yes, the people are finding out, and the more they find out, the less they like it.

It is not surprising that Ministers have not yet decided how they will count people. What happens with all the mechanisms that are being constructed if people still end up voting Labour, because it is a very political tax? We

[Mr. Rooker]

know what will happen, because the first debate on Monday will be on the mechanism for capping the poll tax. Whatever happens with the grant, the business rate or the poll tax, or indeed at the ballot box, if this bunch of dictators do not like the result, they will change it.

The Government have had a bad week and if hon. Gentlemen want them to have a better time next week they know what they can do at 10 o'clock on Monday. We do *not have to* whistle. More than sufficient Tory Members have already voted against the Bill to destroy the Government's majority. Every day, in every vote, this week different Tory Members have voted against different parts of the Bill. They should have the guts to do the right thing on Monday.

I cannot finish on a high note because I have to beg to ask leave to withdraw amendment No. 173 and seek a Division on amendment No. 156.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 86

DISTRIBUTION REPORTS

Amendment proposed: No. 156, in Page 46, leave out lines 34 to 41 and insert—

'86(1) The Secretary of State shall—

(a) determine in relation to each charging and precepting authority notional expenditure assessments having regard to their functions and needs in accordance with principles to be applied to all authorities, and

(b) make a report containing the basis on which he proposes to distribute among receiving authorities those amounts of revenue support grant which fall to be paid to such authorities under this Part, being a basis which has regard to the notional expenditure assessment determined under subsection (1)(a) above.

(2) Before determining the notional expenditure assessment or making the report under subsection (1) above, the Secretary of State shall consult such associations of local authorities as appear to him to be concerned and with any local authority with whom consultation appears to him to be desirable.

(3) This report shall be laid before the House of Commons and shall specify the principles on which the notional expenditure assessments and basis of distribution are determined'.—*[Mr. Rooker.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 209, Noes 328.

Division No. 272] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colenan, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer Bob
Cunnings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James

Walley, Joan
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Frank Cook.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard

Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Orders [22 February and 13 April] and the Resolution [18 April] to put forthwith the Question on amendments moved by a member of the Government, of which notice had been given, to the end of clause 103.*

Clause 89

PAYMENT OF SUMS

Amendments made: No. 105, in page 48, line 35, leave out from 'be' to 'on' in line 43 and insert
'paid by the authority to the Secretary of State'.

No. 45, in page 48, line 45, leave out
'as a simple contract debt'.

No. 106, in page 48, line 47, leave out subsections (8) and (9).—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Clause 96

PAYMENTS TO AND FROM COLLECTION FUNDS

Amendment made: No. 107, in page 52, line 27, leave out
'from the non-domestic rating pool'
and insert
'under paragraph 5(10) of Schedule 7 below, regulations made under paragraph 6(4) of that Schedule, or paragraph 8 of that Schedule'.—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Clause 103

REGULATIONS ABOUT FUNDS

Amendment made: No. 62, in page 57, line 1, leave out subsection (5) and insert—

'(5) Regulations under subsection (4) above in their application to a particular financial year (including regulations amending others) shall not be effective unless they come into force before 1 January in the preceding financial year: but this does not affect regulations revoking others.'.—*[Mr. Howard.]*

Further consideration of the Bill adjourned.—[Mr. Durant.]

Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee), to be further considered on Monday 25 April.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments &c.)

VALUE ADDED TAX

That the Value Added Tax (Confectionery) Order 1988 (S.I., 1988, No. 507), dated 15th March 1988, a copy of which was laid before this House on 15th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

Question agreed to.

EXPORT AND IMPORT OF DANGEROUS CHEMICALS

Ordered,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 8251/86 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of the Environment on 29th January 1988 and 10383/87 on the export and import of certain dangerous chemicals, and welcomes action by the Community to ensure that adequate information on dangerous chemicals is made available to importing countries.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

PETITION

Local Government Reform

10.13 pm

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): On behalf of my constituents in Motherwell, North, I wish to present a petition to the House which invites the House to use its influence to seek to repeal the Act of Parliament which will lead in turn to the poll tax or community charge which my constituents believe will be a regressive form of taxation which is unrelated to ability to pay and will cause severe hardship to the poor, large families and families with dependent relatives, pensioners and many other low income groups, such as student nurses.

To lie upon the Table.

Hampton Court Palace

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

10.14 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): I am grateful for the opportunity to draw the attention of the House to the royal palace of Hampton Court—set between its splendid gardens, the River Thames and two royal parks. It is one of the most glorious and beautiful of the buildings of Britain. Hampton Court palace is of immense historical and architectural interest. As a cherished part of our national heritage, it has an obvious national importance, but hon. Members will understand that it also has a local dimension; thousands of my constituents, not only in the Hamptons but in Teddington, Twickenham and Whitton, know Hampton Court well, love it and are proud of its history and status as a royal palace, which they want upheld.

In the past two years, Hampton Court has suffered two grievous shocks. First, there was the disastrous fire on Easter Monday 1986 and then, in October 1987, the hurricane destroyed some 800 trees in the gardens and royal parks. These were dreadful tragedies, but we must now look forward rather than back. We must try to use what happened as an opportunity to strengthen and recreate all that is best in Hampton Court, so that as the years roll by it can enrich the lives of yet larger numbers of people.

The fact that Hampton Court has so much to give its visitors is not the only reason why it should try to attract more of them. There is the financial aspect. I make no apology for mentioning that. Apart from the exceptional fire reinstatement costs, which are about £5 million spread over three years, the annual running and maintenance costs amount to £6·6 million. That includes the cost of running not only the palace but the gardens, maze, home park, Hampton Court green and the towpath.

By contrast, let us consider the takings from admissions to the palace and maze, the souvenir shops, car park and real tennis courts. I know that you, Mr. Speaker, are very familiar with the real tennis courts at the royal palace of Hampton court because of the championships awarded to members of your family there, but I mention the real tennis courts as a part of the Tudor Hampton Court of King Henry VIII, another very distinguished figure.

The takings from Hampton Court amounted to £1·2 million in 1984-85, and these have increased to £1·6 million in 1987-88. The target for 1988-89 is about £1·8 million. It is encouraging, up to a point, to note that the takings for the Easter weekend, of which I was informed in reply to a written question on 14 April, suggest an annual increase of about 10 per cent.—a trend that is being sustained. However, it is encouraging only up to a point, because there remains an annual gap of not far short of £5 million, which is now being met by our fellow taxpayers.

As a royal palace, Hampton Court is a priceless part of our national heritage; it should never be considered as a mere business. I would certainly not consider it as such. Neither, I am sure, would Ministers in the Department of the Environment. But even if it were regarded as such, it would be fair to remind the House that as a beautiful historic royal palace, Hampton Court helps to draw in overseas visitors; they do not come to Britain for our weather, but for our history, royalty, traditions, arts, heritage and beautiful places; Hampton Court incorporates all those aspects.

The visitors spend money in hotels and restaurants and on shopping; and so generate incomes and jobs which produce a tax yield for the Government. Those effects cannot be measured exactly, but they certainly exist and it is proper that the House should have regard to them because we have a duty to scrutinise financial and economic matters.

It seems to me that £5 million a year is a needlessly large sum for Hampton Court to be expected to pull from the taxpayers. In that connection, I should like to make a number of suggestions. My first point is about access. The biggest obstacle to tourists visiting Hampton Court is the inadequate provision of car parking space, especially during peak seasons and in particular at weekends in peak seasons. It is essential to crack this problem, perhaps by using an area behind existing walls in the north-west corner of Home park or across the Thames at Hampton Court station.

Secondly, on summer weekends on all four approach roads to Hampton Court from Teddington, Kingston, Hampton and over the bridge there are traffic jams trailing back from the zebra crossings at the roundabout at the palace entrance. That is because of peak visiting times the flow of pedestrians is almost continuous. The traffic tailbacks and jams are bad enough to deter some visitors, and are inconvenient to many other people and must be dealt with. So far I have found a noticeable lack of enthusiasm on the part of Richmond borough council in seeking to deal with this by installing traffic lights. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will ask his colleagues in the Department of Transport to take an interest in this matter and to discuss it with Richmond borough council. This afternoon I asked London Buses to carry out a survey on summer weekends to find out how its buses are held up and to make the results of this survey available to the Government, to Richmond borough council and to the Metropolitan police.

Thirdly, parts of Hampton Court are rather bare. The Tudor kitchen, which should be an important feature, is empty. One should be able to go into that kitchen and see Tudor pots and pans and ladles and copper jelly moulds. Perhaps the Government can twist the arm of other great museums that have hoards of objects stashed in their cellars so that those museums will lend some of those objects to Hampton Court. Museums are always asking the Government for money for roof repairs, and I have no doubt that the Government have some pull and influence with the museums. They should be able to persuade them to get those things out of their cellars and into Hampton Court and other places where they can be shown to better advantage.

Fourthly, the presentation at Hampton Court could be modernised. Fifthly, there are empty parts of Hampton Court palace which could be opened up to tourists as tourism grows as part of a long-term trend. Sixthly, the marketing could be improved. Hampton Court is best known for its Tudor associations. The part designed by Christopher Wren is at least as prominent and may well be larger than the Tudor part. However, every schoolchild is taught about Wolsey and Henry VIII and the Tudor monarchs of Hampton Court. Many people are fascinated by the personality of King Henry VIII and his six wives. He could be much better exploited.

[Mr. Toby Jessel]

Hampton Court can learn something from York. In developing its tourist trade, York wanted to use the Romans as a feature. It was advised by a public relations company not to do so, but to use the Vikings who were thought to have more sex appeal. York homed in on the Vikings, with tremendous success. There has been a terrific growth of tourism in York. Hampton Court could learn from that and make more use of its associations with King Henry VIII.

All this can and must be done in a way that does not cheapen Hampton Court palace. If its distinguished royal character is not maintained, we shall lose what people want to see.

Seventhly, the souvenir shops have been doing well, but they could do much better. It appears that, at other stately homes and tourist centres, souvenir shops have a booming trade. Much more still can be made of the Hampton Court souvenir shops.

Eighthly, plant sales could be profitable. Many people visit Hampton Court gardens and ask the gardeners where they can obtain some of the plants that they see. A plant sale point could be set up, perhaps at the new car park, if one is provided. I hope that the Minister will confirm that access to the gardens will continue to be free of charge.

Ninthly, more use should be made of the River Thames. A better, higher-grade quality of boat could be laid on. People could perhaps set out from Westminster pier, have a rather good lunch on the boat, see Kew, Richmond, Twickenham and Teddington, see Hampton Court and then return to London by train.

Tenthly, the marketing process should concentrate on increasing the flow of visitors in the months of March to May and September to November, because Hampton Court is at fairly full capacity in June, July and August.

Eleventhly, there are two blots on the landscape which should be removed. The first is the hideous new ticket office, and the second is the obtrusive white canopy overhanging the exterior of the Tiltyard restaurant. It should never have been put there. It is a disgrace to Hampton Court and should go.

There is also the threat of a further building which could be obtrusive. That would be in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor), whose deep concern for the environment is well known, not only in his constituency, but also in mine. I refer to the site of Hampton Court railway station at the south end of the bridge in East Molesey. There is a planning application for a new building there, which has not yet been decided by the local authority in my hon. Friend's constituency.

I have also received representations from my constituents at Hampton Court green who are concerned that, if they stand on Hampton Court bridge and look along the river downstream, with the historic palace of Hampton Court on their left, they might see a modern building on the right facing across the Thames to Hampton Court. As it is in my hon. Friend's constituency, it would be proper for me to write to the Minister on that matter, with a copy to my hon. Friend, rather than to give my views on the matter in the debate. I hope that that will be acceptable to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): When my hon. Friend considers the transport problems, particularly in respect of the site that he has just mentioned, upon which I do not wish to comment now, will he pay attention to the siting of Hampton Court station, which serves Hampton Court and is in my constituency? Many of my constituents are worried about the intentions of British Rail in respect of that historic station and we are anxious to ensure that it is preserved in use. I am sure that that will be of assistance to my hon. Friend and to the visitors to Hampton Court.

Mr. Jessel: My hon. Friend is right. It is not only outside visitors to Hampton Court and his constituents in East Molesey, but my constituents who live in the palace and around Hampton Court green who use that station and regard it as an attractive old Victorian station. If my hon. Friend decides that he wishes to make any representations on that matter, he can count on my support and that of my constituents.

Finally, there is the administration of Hampton Court palace. It has been extremely fortunate in two most distinguished Chief Stewards—the present incumbent, Lord Maclean, the former Lord Chamberlain, and his predecessor, the late General Sir Rodney Moore. I also pay tribute to the excellent contribution both of the last administrator, General Thompson, and the present, acting administrator, Mr. John Yarnall. A new administrator is to be appointed. The right man must be found; but I wish that the Government would get on with it. I cannot see why it has to take six months. There is a need to end the uncertainty and to build up morale with leadership, zest and enthusiasm. That is the way for Hampton Court's future to be worthy of its great past.

10.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Colin Moynihan): I am particularly privileged to answer this Adjournment debate in your presence, Mr. Speaker, as your personal and family interests have rarely been surpassed in the history of the occupancy of that position, particularly in view of the sporting excellence of your son-in-law, Alan Lovell, whose great ability as a real tennis player, particularly at Hampton Court, has matched the outstanding historical surroundings in which he has played real tennis and the way in which he has always been the best possible ambassador for his sport.

It is also a privilege to be in the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel), whose interest in, and dedication to, Hampton Court has been a consistent feature of his contributions to the debates in the House, and his lobbying, often intensive but always dedicated, of the Minister who happens to be at the Dispatch Box. I know that he has Hampton Court palace very much at his heart, and is careful and considerate about its future. I appreciate the fact that I am now, as a result of his good fortune in securing this Adjournment debate, given the opportunity to explain the general background and some of the details about which I know that he is concerned.

My hon. Friend takes a close constituency and personal interest in Hampton Court. His detailed knowledge and constructive suggestions arising from that are very helpful. I shall deal with his individual comments in a moment, but first I shall say a few words about the palace and what we are setting out to do.

As hon. Members will know, Hampton Court is an unoccupied or "historic" royal palace. That is to say, it belongs to the Queen in right of the Crown, but it is not

used as a royal residence. The Queen's policy interests at the palace are looked after by the Lord Chamberlain. Statutory responsibility for its daily running, including maintenance and opening to the public, rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Hampton Court is one of the country's major tourist attractions, as my hon. Friend has rightly pointed out, with around 600,000 paying visitors a year. It is also a complex business. The total budget for the palace, gardens and park is currently around £8 million. This includes in the current year about £1·5 million for restoration work following the major fire at the palace in March 1986, and a further £2·25 million for other construction and maintenance work. Income is forecast at £1·8 million for 1988-89. About 150 staff are employed at Hampton Court, and although it is not a royal residence, some 60 or so people live there, comprising grace and favour residents, officials and retired officials, of the royal household and of the Department of the Environment.

Although visitor levels are high, the presentation of the palace to the public has fallen behind developments elsewhere, as my hon. Friend has said. In recent years, great strides have been made in improving the presentation of historic houses to the public. The leisure and tourism industries have become more sophisticated and developed, and it is no longer enough—as it was in the early days—simply to open the doors of historic houses to guarantee visitors or visitor satisfaction. Simply opening the doors is not a sufficient guarantee of a fair slice of the visitor market.

That is not a criticism of the way Hampton Court has been run, or of those involved in the past. I am not seriously suggesting that we have done literally nothing but open the doors of the palace in recent times. However, it is sometimes useful to step back and look at what is being done elsewhere. We have done that at Hampton Court and are in no doubt that improvements can be made. The burden on the taxpayer of running Hampton Court is high, and by attracting more visitors and enhancing visitor satisfaction we aim to improve revenues and reduce that burden.

My hon. Friend mentioned the appointment of the administrator and I take on board his comment about the timing. That appointment is the crucial element in the new unified management structure at the palace, introduced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, to put into effect the improvements we are seeking. I am sorry about the resignation of the first administrator, but I give my hon. Friend the assurance he seeks this evening, that we will be recruiting a permanent successor to General Thompson as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, as my hon. Friend knows, we have appointed an acting administrator at the palace, who is taking forward the work already started by General Thompson.

As I have said, we will be looking to improve the presentation of the palace. We shall also be looking at ways to reduce costs. The first task give to the palace administrator has been to prepare, as quickly as possible, a five-year forward business plan and a five-year forward works and maintenance programme. Those plans and programmes will form the basis of future developments at Hampton court and will set out how the business position can be improved. The detailed arrangements for handling the plans and programmes have yet to be worked out, but final clearance will be necessary with both the Lord Chamberlain, on behalf of the Queen, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

It is too early to say what those plans will contain, but my hon. Friend has asked for an assurace, which I am happy to give. Any future developments will have full regard to the status and dignity of Hampton Court as a royal palace; it will not be turned into a Disneyland or a leisure park. What Hampton Court has to offer the visitor, as he rightly points out, is a unique part of our national heritage and we shall build on that. In trying to improve Hampton Court's presentation, we are well aware of the dangers of changing its unique character and status, which are its very attraction.

Before turning to some of the further specific comments and suggestions raised by my hon. Friend, I wish to assure the House that there are no plans—nor could there be—to privatise what is a royal palace. Wild reports that have appeared in the newspapers to that effect are just that. Lastly, my hon. Friend also asks for reassurance on the question of public access to the gardens. I am happy to repeat the firm assurances given by my predecessors that we have no plans at all for charging for entry to the gardens.

My hon. Friend highlighted traffic movement and parking facilities as crucial ingredients in the future development of Hampton Court. I agree with his comments and entirely endorse them, particularly in respect of weekends, holidays, and other busy seasons. Anyone who has been caught up in the traffic surrounding the palace on a summer Sunday will know that congestion is a very real problem there.

How to improve visitor access and traffic flows around the palace is one of the issues for the business plan. I know that the administrator will be tackling this as an early priority. I have to say that I think it unlikely that the Department of Transport will be prepared to finance the installation of traffic lights as recommended by my hon. Friend, as on the roads concerned that would be a local authority matter. However, I appreciate that he has raised the point in view of the importance of discussing the matter with the local authority. We have asked the administrator to talk to the local authority along the lines he requested this evening, to see what improvements can be made.

Car parking also is a serious problem. Facilities at the palace are at present limited and will have to be expanded. Without expansion, we would create serious difficulties by attracting more visitors, and without more car parking, we can do nothing to improve the woefully inadequate signposting on the roads around Hampton Court.

Finding space for new car parking will be difficult—given the special character of all the land in the park and gardens. We do not yet have any firm proposals on this, though I note my hon. Friend's suggestion that we might eventually acquire new land in the immediate area. I was also grateful for his suggestion of "cut and cover" parking provision—if I may summarise his observations and comments to my Department—although experience suggests that it is likely to be too expensive a solution for the return we are likely to get from car parking charges, given the seasonal nature of visitor patterns.

My hon. Friend raised interesting and constructive suggestions about marketing, which I think we should consider carefully, and for which I am grateful. His suggestions of high-quality river trips, the staging of

[Mr. Colin Moynihan]

concerts and ways of improving the presentation of the palace, especially the Tudor areas—he mentioned the Tudor kitchens—are all very much in line with the options that I see as presenting opportunities for the future. I shall ensure that those specific ideas are examined by the administrator and his advisers who are involved in developing future marketing strategies.

I note my hon. Friend's comments about the current planning application, for the development of the land on the British Rail site opposite the palace. I know that he has brought it to the attention of my Department. All development around the area of the palace is of course sensitive, and is scrutinised carefully by all concerned. I shall draw my hon. Friend's comments to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State; but, as the applications are currently before the local planning authority, he will understand why it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

Mr. Jessel: Although my hon. Friend cannot comment on planning aspects, can he make the procedure clear? If an application had been received by local authority, and the authority granted planning permission, would the Department of the Environment have any locus if it disagreed, or would it be too late?

Mr. Moynihan: If the local authority is content with planning applications that come before it, that is perfectly in order and not a matter for any further intervention—even if such intervention is considered wise by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I am sure that it would not be, because the matters that the local authority will consider are purely for that authority. I hope that that helps to satisfy my hon. Friend's concern that any further delay on sensible planning proposals brought to the local authority's attention could be deferred further to the Secretary of State.

Work on the restoration contract, following the major fire on Easter Monday 1986, is now due to start in July or August. We expect the work to take about three years, and if possible to be completed just before the summer season in 1991. During the work, some disruption to the public visiting the palace, and to staff and residents, will be unavoidable. However, we are doing all that we can to minimise this, first by ensuring access routes for the deliveries and contractors' vehicles that are the least intrusive, and secondly by restricting deliveries of materials to between 8 am and 10 am on weekdays.

I appreciate my hon. Friend's feelings about the unfortunate appearance of, for instance, scaffolding during the summer season. The administrator is also very concerned about that, and discusses individual cases with the Property Services Agency. Wherever possible, areas to which the public have access, or which impact on their enjoyment of the palace, are kept free of works during the summer season, but this is of course not always possible. Sometimes there are emergencies, and in some cases good weather is required for the works to be carried out.

I was sorry to hear about the problems associated with potential vehicle damage to the towpath, on which representations have been made to me. Steps have been taken to instruct palace staff on the need to avoid damage to the grass verges when collecting litter. We shall look into possible solutions to the problem of speeding.

I hope that, in the brief time available to me, I have dealt with most of my hon. Friend's points. I will ensure that any that I have missed, or to which, because of lack of time, I have been unable to turn my attention—particularly those relating to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor)—will be considered by the administrator. I agree strongly with my hon. Friend on the need for a strong sense of direction following the major fire and the recent organisational changes. I hope that the changes that we have planned will build on the loyalty of the royal palace staff and add to their satisfaction. We should all recognise that loyalty as critically important and of great service to the palace.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 22 April 1988

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITIONS

Bradford Health Authority

9.34 am

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): I wish to present a petition on behalf of more than 2,000 of my constituents, including Elizabeth Evans of 93 Eskdale rise, Allerton and Maureen Woods of 82 Sunningdale, Bradford 8.

The petition calls for additional funding to be made available to the Bradford health authority, bearing in mind the extent of ill health throughout the district, especially the infant mortality rate, which is well above the national average. Sad to say, more babies die in Bradford than anywhere else in the country. There is also concern at the closure of the maternity ward B3 at St. Luke's hospital, the referral of some family planning advice from the National Health Service clinics to general practitioners, and cuts in the community nursing service.

The petition urges the Government:

"to take action to ensure Bradford Health Authority does not go into deficit necessitating cuts in expenditure of more than £2 million over the next two years: To improve patient services which will inevitably be impaired if expenditure cuts are implemented; and to prevent more effectively illness in Bradford much of which arises from the consequences of unemployment and poverty throughout the district.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray that your Honourable House will enact legislation to provide the necessary funding for the National Health Service to operate to its full capacity in Bradford."

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Pat Wall (Bradford, North): I wish to present a petition on behalf of 1,788 of my constituents. The petition opposes the proposed cut of £2 million in the expenditure of Bradford health authority in the next two years. That expenditure is especially vital because Bradford is one of the most socially deprived towns of Britain. For every 100 middle-aged men who die of heart disease in the rest of the country, 140 die in the city of Bradford. The life expectancy of a girl born in the city of Bradford is two and a half years less than that of her sister who is born elsewhere in the country.

I present the petition, which has been signed by nearly 1,800 of my constituents, because we believe that the Government could well find the money that is necessary for our Health Service not only to maintain it but to improve it. It says:

"Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will urge the Government to take action to ensure Bradford Health Authority does not go into deficit necessiting cuts in expenditure of more than £2 million over the next two years: To improve patient services which will inevitably be impaired if expenditure cuts are implemented; and to prevent more effectively illness in Bradford much of which arises from the consequences of unemployment and poverty throughout the district."

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I have great pleasure in presenting a petition from my constituents, with more than 2,000 signatures. It was brought down during the night by a group of nurses from hospitals in Bradford who are concerned about the £2 million cuts decided by the Bradford area health authority. The nurses who organised the petition felt so concerned that they gave up their own time to travel through the night to give us the petitions so that we can present them to the House.

The nurses are worried because, last year, there were authenticated reports of babies being turned away from the acute baby unit of the Bradford royal infirmary. I am told by some of the nurses that newly qualified nurses who wish to take further courses are not given that opportunity because of expenditure cuts, even though the administrators would like them to achieve further qualifications. Nurses are unable to do so because the courses are inadequately funded.

The petition is an expression of concern by nurses and a strong sample of more than 2,000 people in Bradford, South about the National Health Service. We are concerned because the Prime Minister does not care about the National Health Service and this petition shows——

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): On a point of order——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think I need a point of order. The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) must not make a speech or accusations of that kind when presenting a petition.

Mr. Cryer: I am reflecting the views of the people of Bradford and this petition is an expression of their concern.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure it is.

Mr. Cryer: I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to present this petition on behalf of the 2,000 signatories and of nurses and health workers in Bradford.

To lie upon the Table.

Nurses (Pay and Conditions)

9.41 am

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I wish to present a petition signed by more than 7,000 people over the past three months and collected by members of the National Union of Public Employees. It is signed by patients, hospital workers and members of the general public in support of the nurses and the nursing profession.

The petition calls for decent pay and conditions and proper treatment for nurses in the National Health Service. The signatures have been collected by the Wakefield office of NUPE and come from all over Yorkshire, Humberside and other parts of the country. The petition says:

"the current proposals of the Management Side of the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Whitley Council in respect of nurses' pay will not justly reward nursing staff for their dedication to hard and responsible work. We also deplore the

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

proposals to cut Special Duty payments and other allowances, which are paid to nurses for night, weekend, and bank holiday work and other duties.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will oppose these proposals and urge the Government to meet the justified claims of nursing staff, for a fair salary settlement."

The petition is signed by thousands of people in one part of the country, but reflects the views of millions throughout the rest of the country and it has my absolute and full support.

To lie upon the Table.

Grandparents' Rights

9.43 am

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I wish to present a petition on behalf of the residents of the United Kingdom. Its 8,500 signatories ask the House seriously to consider the issue of grandparents' rights.

The signatories are protesting because the present law will not allow them access to their grandchildren, the right to be considered for foster parenthood of those children or the right to adopt them. They want the House to consider introducing legislation to afford them these rights, so that they can have access to their grandchildren and be considered at official hearings into whether they can be the official guardians of, or legally adopt, their grandchildren. That is the right of every grandparent in the country and we are asking the House to consider it.

Apart from its 8,500 signatories, the petition is supported by a number of grandparents' organisations throughout the country. In addition, I hope that the House will consider giving a Second Reading to a Bill that would give grandparents these rights.

To lie upon the Table.

Economic League

9.45 am

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Today's *Guardian* carries an article on page 7 headlined

"Labour MPs named in Economic League list demand inquiry".

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) moved a ten-minute Bill recently which concerned the activities of the Economic League. In the course of that debate the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick), opposing the Bill, said that the Economic League carried out systematic surveillance of Members of the House of Commons. During the course of that debate, in which I intervened, you were good enough to express the view that if such systematic surveillance was being carried out by the Economic League, that would have serious implications for you and the House.

It is clear from this report that the Economic League is carrying out systematic surveillance of hon. Members, and I understand that it has prepared a list naming hon. Members which has come into the possession of *The Guardian*. Will you, Mr. Speaker, take advantage of the weekend to make inquiries about the Economic League and ascertain the methods by which this surveillance is carried out, so as clearly to establish whether it has threatened the privileges of the House and the ability of hon. Members freely to represent the views of their constituents?

I ask you to reflect on whether this constitutes a breach of privilege and, when you have had time to consider these matters, to tell us whether you believe that these activities constitute grounds for complaint to the Committee of Privileges.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) in asking that this matter be referred to the Committee of Privileges. I do so as one of the hon. Members mentioned in the article —along with a number of others. This is a breach of the privileges of the House——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must tell both hon. Gentlemen that I have not seen the article, but I shall look at it. If any hon. Member feels threatened in any way or believes that this constitutes a question of privilege, he should write to me about it. Matters of privilege are not raised on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: If it is a matter of privilege, I must have a letter.

Mr. Cryer: I would be upset if my name was not on any list produced by the Economic League, but I hope you will treat the matter seriously, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It may be known to you that, after the ten-minute Bill about the Economic League, I consulted the Clerk to the Privileges Committee. He properly

brought to my attention certain technical aspects, so I did not write to you, in the belief that his advice was good —I still think it was.

Is there any way in which this real problem can be tackled apart from privilege? Perhaps privilege is not the right way to go about it, but could you reflect over the weekend and advise us on how to go about tackling what is a real problem?

Mr. Speaker: It is not for me to advise hon. Members on tactics, but I shall certainly look at the article.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I understand that you will be reflecting on whether this constitutes a matter of privilege——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot do that on my own account. If a letter is written to me alleging this, I shall consider it seriously.

Mr. Corbyn: In the expectation that you may receive such a letter, Mr. Speaker, my point of order is that a number of Opposition Members have been named in the article, which scurrilously names people and attempts to prevent them from gaining other employment should they ever wish to do that in the future. Will you, Mr. Speaker, make time for a debate on the activities of the Economic League and of other organisations which seek to smear individuals in this cowardly way to protect themselves, and which attack people who oppose their activities?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that it is not in my hands to give time for a debate on such matters. There are plenty of other occasions on which the hon. Gentleman may be able to raise the matter.

Protection of Animals (Amendment) Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

9.51 am

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): On a point of order Mr. Speaker. You will appreciate that the Bill contains two substantive clauses, but all the amendments that you have called are in respect of the second clause. My amendment No. 2 would have addressed itself to clause 1. I should like to make it clear that I wholly support the Bill, but, because my hon. Friends the Whips locked me up for 147 hours in the Local Government Finance Bill Committee earlier this year, it was quite impossible for me to become involved in the Committee stage of this Bill. It seems to me that, before voting on clause 1, we should have an opportunity to press the Minister to clarify some points. I personally believe that the clause could go a great deal further than it does. I wonder whether there will be an opportunity to discuss the clause, now or at a later stage, so that we may know exactly what we are voting on.

Mr. Speaker: It is not the practice on Report to consider Bills clause by clause. I have not been able to select the hon. Gentleman's amendment, and we must proceed with the amendments that I have selected.

Clause 2

OFFENCES RELATING TO ANIMAL FIGHTS

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 2, line 7, at end, insert

'and in this section being present shall include knowingly advertising such fights'.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 6, in page 2, line 14, at end insert

'and in this section being present shall include knowingly advertising such fights'.

Mr. Cohen: You rather caught me by surprise, Mr. Speaker, because I thought that the promoter of the Bill would make a formal statement about it. Clearly I was mistaken about the procedure.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne), who has done a very good job. I congratulate him, first, on winning the ballot and, secondly, on seeing the Bill through Committee with great tenacity, despite many difficulties. The Bill amends the legislation governing the protection of animals, and, although the amendment that it makes is a small one, it is extremely worth while. I hope that the Bill will have a smooth passage today and in another place, and that it will become law, although I hope, too, that a few improvements will be made to it, if not here, then in another place. Even then, I do not think that it will be an end of the matter. I am sure that the hon. Member for Winchester will acknowledge that many further improvements will be needed to ensure proper animal welfare and protection. The amendments deal with the advertising of these horrendous and atrocious dog fights. Perhaps on Third Reading we shall refer in detail to some instances—some very close to my constituency—of this barbaric activity; I would not call it a sport. Some people place a great deal of money in bets on the fights and therefore they have a vested interest in them. This House has been too slow to deal with the problem.

[Mr. Cohen]

The amendments seek to tighten up the Bill by including advertising. The matter was raised during the third sitting of the Standing Committee on an amendment that I had tabled. Unfortunately, owing to circumstances beyond my control, I could not move the amendment; I was detained at Mr. Speaker's pleasure at the time. I am therefore grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) for moving the amendment and to the hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) who made some useful comments about it.

Formal advertisements promoting fights have been known to appear in hunting newspapers, such as *Shooting News and Weekly*, and advertising is also carried out by less formal means, informing those interested in gambling on these wicked events of where they are to take place.

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): Does the hon. Gentleman intend—perhaps he would wish it to be done in the other place—to introduce a definition of the word "advertisement"? I am rather worried about this. Let us consider an example. Two people may be chatting in a public house and one may say, "Do you know there's a dog fight due to take place in the barn down the road on Saturday?" That may be overhead by an RSPCA inspector and, if he is over-zealous he may construe those remarks, which involve the passing of information from one person to another, as an advertisement.

Mr. Cohen: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point, although he is somewhat pre-empting the development of my argument. I hope that the conversation would, indeed be overhead by an RSPCA inspector, but I trust that he would take action not against the two people at the bar, but to stop the dog fight. On the hon. Gentleman's main point, it would be for the courts to decide. In the example that he gave, I do not think that any court would treat the passing of the information by word of mouth as a case for prosecution. However, some advertising is done not by word of mouth, but by leaflets and advertisements, subtly worded though they may be, and in those cases the courts could justly decide that the offence of "knowingly advertising" had been committed and was punishable by the law.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): Let me press the hon. Gentleman on the question of advertisements, some of them, as he put it, subtly worded. A few moments ago he mentioned the name of a well-known sporting journal, and it would be of great value to the House if he could present us with an example of an advertisement that he alleges advertises this barbaric sport, as he calls it.

Mr. Cohen: Again, the hon. Gentleman is trying to pre-empt the later part of my speech, but I am happy to give the information off the cuff.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I sympathise with my hon. Friend's argument, but I share the concern about clarification of "advertising".

My hon. Friend will be aware that often we discuss legislation that we believe clearly outlines what we as a Parliament seek to achieve and makes it clear how we hope the courts will interpret cases, but find that that is not the case. Today we are talking about animal welfare. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be aware of the dilemma in the animal world about people who go badger digging and about what happens to the dogs used in that barbaric practice. Learned judges say, "That is not what Parliament meant when it said that dogs used in badger baiting should be confiscated". Therefore, while I am extremely sympathetic to my hon. Friend, I hope that we shall get a clear definition of "advertising".

Mr. Cohen: I appreciate what my hon. Friend has said about the law being tight and the problems about badger digging. I will come to that point later. An amendment that I tabled on that topic has not been selected, but it contains elements which would be appropriate for discussion on Third Reading and I hope to refer to them then.

At the moment the courts cannot pick up any offence of advertising dog fights. Therefore, people will not be prosecuted for advertising such activities. We should have a tightly drawn law on this point, and this amendment is a step in the right direction in that it makes advertising dog fights a criminal offence. Indeed, under my amendment the offence of advertising would be similar to that of being present at a dog fight and the courts would treat an advertiser of such an activity in the way that they would treat someone who was present at a fight.

10 am

Of course the courts must decide, and I appreciate that they often allow people to interpret the law in a way which differs from our interpretation of the law. That has certainly happened with badgers. If the courts took a similar view with regard to amendment No. 5, we would have to tighten the law later.

The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) asked for an example of an advertisement for dog fights. I have a copy of *Shooting News and Weekly* dated 6 December 1985, which admittedly is a while ago. Part 40 of that issue contains an advertisement which states:

> "Now available! Badger Digging With Terriers by David Harcombe. A fair and balanced view of the latest field sport to be banned. The true story and a convincing account of a recent terrier work."

The advertisement then states where the book is available and that it contains information on how to hunt badgers with dogs. That is significant, because that activity was banned. When the advertisement appeared, hunting badgers with dogs—in many cases the same dogs as are used in dog fighting—was banned. However, that book, describing an illegal activity, was advertised in that magazine. The advertisement referred to a recent incident of that illegal activity.

It is hard to reconcile that advertisement with the law. Such adverts and those that relate specifically to the precise locations of dog fights should be banned. I do not expect *Shooting News and Weekly*, *Shooting Times and Country Magazine* or any other magazine or pamphlet to state that a dog fight will take place at a certain location on a certain date. They will not do that. However, they may contain information about where the details may be obtained. Indeed, informal publications may contain the information about dog fights or have details on how people can learn where such barbaric activities occur.

We should take a strong line against such advertisements. We should make it clear in law that they are not acceptable. In the Bill, we have increased the penalties for those who organise these activities although we have not

increased them as much as I would have liked. We have created the new offence of being present at dog fights and set severe penalties for those convicted of being present. I pay tribute to all hon. Members who improved the law by supporting the amendments which increased the penalties for the organisers and those who were present at dog fights. We should also put pressure on the advertisers of these activities. That loophole should not exist.

The advertisement of dog fights was raised in Committee and the hon. Member for Harborough and my hon. Friend the Member for Erdington gave examples. In reply to the points raised, the Minister said on 24 February:

"The section which, in certain circumstances, is capable of including advertising, is section 1(1)(c) of the Protection of Animals Act 1911, which makes it an offence to 'cause, procure, or assist at the fighting or baiting of any animal' and thereafter various general words are used.

I do not believe that advertising per se falls within the scope of section 1(1)(c), although it sometimes will do, but I believe that there is merit in considering whether advertising per se should be an ofence. I am clear in my own mind that it should not be an absolute offence."

I disagree with the Minister there.

"It would not be right to prosecute a publisher who carried in his newspaper an advertisement which was not obviously an advertisement for dog fighting, but which turned out to be for the reasons described by my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough . . . there is merit in an offence of knowingly advertising"—

and these were the Minister's words—

"of knowingly advertising. That then has to be spelt out and conceivably a statutory defence given."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee C*, 24 February 1988; c. 78.]

The Minister gave a commitment to reflect on that, and I was grateful for his commitment. He sent a letter to the hon. Member for Winchester on 20 April and I am grateful to him for sending me a copy of that letter in which the Minister referred to his commitment to review the matter. In the letter the Minister states:

"I have now looked into this point, but it would seem that such an amendment would add little in practical terms to the provisions already contained in the 1911 Act.

'Section 1(1)(c) of that Act makes it an offence to 'cause, procure, or assist at the fighting or baiting of any animal'. I understand that 'procure' can cover a number of activities, including notifying and transporting spectators to the site of a fight. Advertising by a promoter of a fight might be good evidence of procuring but advertising by someone who is otherwise unconnected with the fight itself is probably not. There might in fact be serious difficulties in sustaining a charge of advertising against such persons because the element of knowledge is an integral part of the offence. It is doubtful whether there would be many advertisers of animal fights, outside of those who could be said to procure, who would not benefit from a defence based on lack of requisite knowledge.

Bearing all this in mind and the possibility of prejudicing the Bill's progress if an amendment is introduced at this stage, I would prefer not to proceed further with the proposed amendment."

I appreciate that point. However, as the Minister said, advertising by someone otherwise unconnected with the fight will not be covered—"probably not" are the Minister's words—under section 1(1)(c) of the 1911 Act which deals with procuring. Therefore, a gaping loophole in the law will still exist. The Minister said that it will be hard to sustain

"a charge of advertising against such persons because the element of knowledge is an integral part of the offence."

The Minister said that the defence could be based on the level of knowledge. That must be a matter for the courts to decide. At the moment people frequently come before the courts and claim that they did not know that an offence was being committed, or use a similar defence. However, the courts decide whether that defence is sufficient or whether the person is guilty of the offence as charged. That point should not preclude us from accepting amendment No. 5.

I have deliberately used the words "knowingly advertising" because the Minister said that he would consider that concept. In Committee I simply used the word "advertised", but I have used the term "knowingly advertising" in amendment No. 5 in accordance with what the Minister has said.

It is a reasonable amendment. I note that in the last sentence of his letter the Minister said that he did not want to prejudice the progress of the Bill at this stage. I appreciate that and understand it. I, too, do not want to prejudice the Bill. I hope that by saying that the Minister is leaving the door open a little to reconsider the matter. If the House does not want to accept my amendment today —I do not want to prejudge that because I hope that every hon. Member here will speak in support of it—I hope that the other place will consider a similar amendment so that we can close the loophole and get the people who advertise the fights as well as those who organise and attend them.

I am pleased to commend my amendment to the House. I hope that the House will consider it sympathetically. I give a final word of praise to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne). I hope that we shall make progress on his Bill.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): It gives me pleasure to speak on this important Bill and to add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) on introducing it and on the way in which he has taken it through the House. I declare my interest in that a few months ago I produced a Bill to give courts the power to disqualify the owners of animals from keeping them once they had been convicted of cruelty. That measure is subsumed in this Bill. In addition, I took through the House last year the Protection of Animals (Penalties) Bill, which doubled the penalties in terms of fines and imprisonment for those promoting the wicked practice of dog fighting. This Bill takes that measure further.

I respect the sincerity of the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), but I cannot agree with what he said. I receive many letters from people who know of my interest in the protection of animals and the punishment of people who abuse them. Quite often I receive through the post subtle advertisements that people pick up indicating obliquely that there will perhaps be a dog fight at a certain location. The people who send those advertisements have read that information into them. I have no reason to doubt that there is a subtle process going on around the country in small advertisements that are understood by those who follow dog fights so that they know that there will be a dog fight at such and such a place at such and such a time. We know that that evil practice is growing.

I would not make the advertisements illegal because they provide the police and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals with some clues as to where they might pick up a dog fight. We know that the RSPCA and the police are gradually getting better at detecting where dog fights might take place. Often they anticipate the fights, and the fact that they are around

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means that no fight occurs. That is a great gain and it comes about through the advertising process. It is a valuable source of intelligence.

The process of advertising is particularly obnoxious when it is so subtle as to be unreadable by the police and those who have a trained eye to detect what is intended by the advertisement. However, I believe that intelligence will improve with time and the advertisers and promoters of dog fights by that subtle but evil means will be picked up.

10.15 am

I also oppose the amendment because by following advertisements—for example, advertisements for pit bull terriers and the cost of them—we can know how the market is going, where the animals are being bred, who is breeding them and what they are asking for them. A lady sent me a minute advertisement this week that was found in a local freebie paper. It invited people to buy American pit bull terriers, which are those used almost exclusively for dog fights, at a cost of £350 a puppy. A high price for a thoroughbred Rottweiler puppy would be £150. That provides us with information. First, it tells us the high cost of pit bull terriers, and we know that the reason for the high price is that they are tremendous earners for their evil masters. They are trained for fighting and their teeth are filed down. It is valuable to be aware of those high prices in advertisements as a means of seeing how the market is going.

Another reason for the high price is that dog fights attract a large number of spectators and a great deal of gambling takes place. That all adds to the value of pit bull terriers. What an evil and wicked practice it is. I must make these points in order to demonstrate why I cannot agree with the hon. Member for Leyton.

Mr. Wilshire: Before my hon. Friend leaves the point about pit bull terriers, may I ask him whether he thinks that the ownership of those particularly obnoxious animals ought to be made illegal? If I follow him correctly, his argument that we should allow advertising of criminal offences so that we may know what is going on could lead to some spectacular examples of things appearing in newspapers if we took his point to the extreme and allowed any criminal activity to be advertised. I suggest that pit bull terriers should be banned. I wonder whether my hon. Friend agrees with me. The *Today* newspaper of 28 July 1987—my hon. Friend may have seen this—said that 12 of the last 18 deaths caused by dogs were down to those animals.

Mr. Greenway: I thank my hon. Friend for making that important point. I do not think that at this stage I would go so far as to ban people from owning American pit bull terriers, but I would ban the import of them. I wish that the Home Office could find some way of banning their importation from America. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to look for a way to do that. They are being brought into this country in increasing numbers and are being advertised as being brought in. In America pit bull terriers have become so vicious as to attack people. Two people have been killed by pit bull terriers that have been trained to fight. It is a sad abuse of pit bull terriers, which, if properly trained, can be normal, sensible and reasonably passive animals. They can be trained to associate normally with other dogs and with human beings and other animals.

The lady who sent me the advertisement for the sale of pit bull terriers at £350 runs a dog training club. Every week at the club she has a vet who keeps a weather eye on what is going on. The vet has advised the lady that the dog training club should not allow the owners of pit bull terriers to take their dogs along for training. As it has been discovered that in some cases the dogs do not behave normally, and that is a danger to the class, the vet has advised that pit bull terriers cannot be taken into a public class for dogs, and that is sad.

I do not know what Mrs. Woodhouse would have done in such a situation. She could have wrenched and pulled, but she would not have got very far as the dogs are trained to be so vicious and anti-social that they are unacceptable in a dog training class. That is sad. The dogs are not only being abused by being promoted to fight and having their teeth filed down for that purpose, but they are being isolated as individuals, and that is no way to treat any animal.

It would be a mistake to ban the advertising because there are various ways in which dog fights can be detected—by examing the trends in advertising, breeding, values and sales. Matters associated with the wicked sport of dog fighting can be detected through advertising and for that reason it would be a mistake to ban it.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): I have listened with great care to the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), and in spite of what he has said, I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) has a good point.

I am interested in the proposition that action should be taken against the advertiser and not against the editor or owner of the medium used to carry that advertisement. I have a background as a modest pencil journalist, and if I had anything to do with the publication to which such advertisements were offered, I would refuse to publish not the advertisement for the dog but those advertisements which are concerned with the setting up of a bogus club or association and which announce that the AGM of that association will be held near the junction of a particular motorway at a particular time on a particular day. I understand that that is one of the codes used to pass around the announcement of what is, to everyone who understands those words, a dog fight.

I would look to the editors and advertising managers of the newspapers and magazines to deal with the carrying of such advertisements, which can do nothing to enhance the integrity and reputation of the publications.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that I am not attacking reasonable, reputable newspapers and journals? From the evidence I have received, it seems that most of those advertisements appear in freebies. Many freebies certainly have very high standards, but others are of a disgracefully low standard, and that should be looked into.

Mr. Corbett: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says. Now that he has raised the point about freebies, I have to get in a plug for the *Erdington and Sutton News*, which serves part of my constituency and which won an award as Britain's best community newspaper. I cannot imagine the editor of that publication, which I consider to use proper editorial standards, allowing such advertisements to be carried.

The hon. Member for Ealing, North mentioned that the publications which carry such developments assist such bodies as the RSPCA to keep an eye on what is happening. That is bound to be the case, but it is not a good enough reason to allow such advertisements to be carried. I have no direct knowledge of the subject, but I suspect that one of the main ways in which those horrendous events are advertised is by word of mouth in the bar or the lounge of a pub. Again, this is no criticism of publicans or breweries, but it is well know that certain pubs in certain areas attract certain groups of people who have a shared interest. Some of those shared interests may be totally acceptable and innocent, but I suspect that others are not.

We have made a distinction between the advertiser and those in charge of the publications which are presently carrying the advertisements. The advertiser himself—I am not being sexist, but my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton will agree that it is mainly fellows who are mixed up in this kind of evil—is likely to be an official of a bogus club or association set up for this vile purpose. If that is the case, that person would be caught under the Bill in any event. However, that does not totally dispose of my hon. Friend's point. I hope, on the basis of what has been said so far, that before we consider the amendment, the Minister might feel able to say at least that it is worth looking again at this so that the Bill can make progress today and that perhaps it might be considered anew in another place.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) and the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) for their kind words. The hon. Member for Leyton said quite correctly in his speech putting forward the amendment that my hon. and learned Friend the Minister had agreed after the Committee stage to look into the question of knowing advertisements. I quite understand the views of the hon. Gentleman and I have very strong sympathy with his intentions. In fact, I think that it is a very valid point. I agree with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett). I think that it is a very valid point, and I urge my hon. and learned Friend to continue to investigate this facet with the view, if we come to a joint conclusion, that it should be introduced into the Bill in its passage through another place in a few weeks' time.

As I said, I sympathise very strongly with the views of the hon. Member for Leyton, but my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North has raised a very interesting question which I must admit I had not thought about before—the question of intelligence, monitoring and the very difficult job of finding out what is going on in this underworld, where and when.

I think that that is a very interesting point and I know my hon. Friend's tremendous expertise in the area of animal welfare from what he has already done, and I will allude to that in my Third Reading speech. I urge my hon. and learned Friend to take real account of that, and possibly to consult the RSPCA, the police and people who are actively engaged in finding out the times and locations of the fights to check out that point, because I think that we can come to a decision. Although I sympathise with the hon. Member for Leyton in that it may be to the advantage of trying to curb and destroy this so-called sport that it would be better to leave the situation as it is.

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) raised the point of whether we should ban the import of pit bull terriers. Again, I would support that. Although my natural instinct is for the freedom to allow people to have what dogs they like, if these dogs are proven statistically to be outrageously dangerous to the community at large, as in the two incidents that my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North has quoted, and/or are used exclusively for a so-called sport that we are again trying to eradicate, I agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Wilshire: I am not advocating a ban on the import of pit bull terriers. I am advocating a ban on owning them. That goes much further, and it would better achieve what we require.

Mr. Browne: I take my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Perhaps I could help my hon. Friend. It was I who advocated a ban on the importation of pit bull terriers.

Mr. Browne: I thank my hon. Friend for clearing up that point. I agree that action should be taken in both respects—both ownership and, even more draconian, the importation of pit bull terriers—if that is thought to be necessary and if the statistics can be proved. Otherwise, I should lean more on the side of freedom.

10.30 am

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to think about both points: first, the carrying of advertisements, thereby wishing to destroy the sport, and, secondly, the ownership of pit bull terriers and the banning of their importation. We may be able to get together between now and discussion of the Bill in another place to see whether the Government could table appropriate amendments at that time.

Mr. Wilshire: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) for his sterling work in bringing this problem before Parliament. The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) has my support, but I wish to go further and to seek a tighter definition of the activities to which he alluded. He referred to advertising, but as I am not a lawyer I do not know whether that would involve "encouraging". I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister would comment on that point. Advertising is a specific activity, whereas the discussion in the pub is most certainly encouraging someone to attend something. That in itself should constitute an offence.

I raised a point of order earlier to explain that, because I had been locked up in the Standing Committee on the Local Government Finance Bill earlier this year, it had been impossible for me to find the time to take part in the Standing Committee proceedings on this Bill but that, had it been possible, I should have wished to do so. I am strongly of the opinion that the practice of animal fighting of any sort is wrong. I include in this category bull fighting in Spain. I wonder whether my hon. Friend the Minister could enlighten me as to whether, when we Brits go abroad and watch bull fights, we might be committing an offence. That might be one way of doing something about dog fighting. I understand that the bull-fighting trade in Spain is now maintained by tourist interest rather than by local interest.

If my mail bag is anything to go by, my constituents feel more strongly about this activity than they do about the National Health Service, the social security changes or the community charge. I have had more correspondence,

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approaches and visits to my surgery from constituents about cruelty to animals, particularly dog fighting, than about those three subjects. On their behalf, too, therefore, I am taking part in this debate.

I am also spurred into action by an article on 16 February in *The Independent*. I see that by a whisker I avoided being the Member of Parliament who had the ignominy of having a dog fight in his constituency. To give some idea of what is happening at the moment, *The Independent* said that 10 men were to appear at Uxbridge magistrates court on 1 March 1988, charged under the Protection of Animals Act 1911 with organising a dog fight. The article said:

"The charges follow a raid yesterday in which police stopped a fight on open ground near the M25 and M4 interchange."

The land in question only just avoids being in my constituency.

It would help if we knew exactly what we were discussing when we are considering the advertising of dog fights. We ought to remind ourselves of what happens at dog fights. One example will make the point. *The Independent* carried an article on 10 February 1988 that read:

"In one article"—

the publication referred to is *Pit Bull News*, to which sleazy publication I shall turn in due course—

"in a 1987 issue of the magazine it reports that a dog called Boss 'literally ate alive' another dog. Another dog called General 'took the leg almost completely off Bart.'"

This particularly sick magazine then had this to say about such things:

"'It is a tribute to Bart that during the whole of his destruction he never made a whimper.'"

The photographs that are sent to me and other hon. Members are sickening. I would prefer the word "encouraging" in relation to advertising because anybody who writes items like that, or who publishes prints or distributes items like that, or who has them in his or her possession should be considered as having committed an offence.

Mr. Corbett: I urge the hon. Gentleman not to make a distinction between what appears in the editorial columns and what appears in advertisements. He may wish to prevent the publication of paid-for advertisements, but he may also think that the printing of such descriptions in the editorial columns is just as repugnant.

Mr. Wilshire: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. If I was not making that point clear, he has given me the chance to do so. I am opposed to advertisements, both paid and otherwise, and to editorial matter. It should not be a defence for anybody to say, "I happened to print this item without knowing what it was." It must surely be right that the printer, the distributor, the seller and the owner of that kind of literature, whether it be editorial matter or advertisements, knows what is going on; otherwise they are in dereliction of their duty as printers and distributors.

Mr. Paice: I am fascinated by my hon. Friend's use of the word "encourage." I endorse my hon. Friend's point, but if he is asking the Government to introduce such an amendment in the other place, I wonder whether, rather than using "encourage," which is a vague word, he might consider using another word that my hon. Friend was successful in having written into another Bill. The word "promote" would better define both areas to which he has referred.

Mr. Wilshire: I deliberately steered away from the word "promote. I thought that it might excite a few hon. Members if I referred to clause 28 of the Local Government Act, which imposes a ban on the promotion of homosexuality. When the hon. Member for Leyton was challenged about the definition of "advertising" and whether we should seek to table an amendment to have the word written into the Bill, he said that that was for the courts to decide. Opposition Members challenged me on that occasion about the use of the word "promote". I said that the courts exist to define such words, but I was ridiculed.

As I support the hon. Member for Leyton, I am sure that he will be only too pleased to support me when I say that the use of the word "promote" in such circumstances is admirable and that the courts should protect society on such occasions. However, I am sure that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, are about to tell me that I digress.

As well as describing what happens at dog fights, we ought to understand that they are not a mere whim of a few mentally sick people—though I consider them to be something along those lines. Dog fighting is not just a hobby—there is a lot of money at stake. My hon. Friend spoke about the value of the dogs. The RSPCA, when earlier this year seeking to lend support to this measure, pointed out that bets of up to £50,000 have been known. We are talking big money, and that means that the organisation could be national or even international. Money and profit could become the motive for causing such cruelty to animals, and where one is dealing with a practice that generates a large amount of financial interest and activity, it is proper that we should take action. I hope that nobody who hears or reads this debate will think that we are trying to use draconian measures against a few people who are minding their own business. We are trying to do more because it is not just a matter of a few people minding their own business.

When I first took an interest in this matter, I thought that a dog fight involved just a few minutes' savagery and cruelty, and then it was over. However, the more I hear about what takes place, the more I learn of dogs mauling and biting each other, and tearing each other to pieces for lengths of time of between one and two hours. That compounds the whole question and provides us with every reason for supporting the hon. Member for Leyton.

I have also tried to establish how frequent dog fights are. If they are an aberration that occurs only rarely, there might be some justification for saying that we should not go down this track. The best estimate I have from those who have researched the matter in any depth is that fights are held at least weekly somewhere in this country, where such cruelty goes on for a good few hours. That does us no credit and we should take action.

If we cannot clarify the matter today with amendments Nos. 5 and 6, it would be better to withdraw them and get the wording right for another place. I believe we should be more specific in some respects. The *Pit Bull News* is one specialised magazine that has been mentioned. It is not a matter of advertisements and casual snippets of information appearing here and there. There are magazines produced and circulated—albeit, thank goodness, they are not on sale in W. H. Smith—that

specialise in the subject. Far from allowing them to be published so that there will be available trade intelligence about dog fights, we should be making it possible for the police to go in pursuit of those who publish them, so that they may be stamped out once and for all. The best way might be to make it an offence to be in possession of such a publication, as well as advertising in it. It is for those reasons that I support the amendments.

Mr. Greg Knight: I agree with hon. Friend about the need to support the amendment of the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen). However, does he agree with my earlier comment that we need to define the word "advertisement"? It would be going too far if it were held that "advertisement" covered conversation.

Mr. Wilshire: I fall back on my excuse of not being a lawyer. I suspect that there are many arguments why the word "advertisement" should not include conversation. However, I would not haul myself back from that, which is why I said that the word "encourage", or, as it is being used now, the word "promote ", is much nearer to what I had in mind. I believe that, if one person says to another, "There is a dog fight going on near the M25 interchange —why don't you come because it will be tremendous fun?", such a conversation should be caught within the meaning of encouraging people to take part. If Britons going to Spain teaches us anything, it is that there would be many more people interested in the barbaric spectacle of dog fights if they knew how to go about attending them.

Mr. Knight: I am sorry to labour the point. I agree with my hon. Friend, but I am concerned that the innocent person in conversation in a pub with two or three others, who says "Do you know that there is a dog fight happening?", without indicating any encouragement or approval, could be said to be advertising that event.

Mr. Wilshire: This interesting discussion takes me back to clause 28 of the Local Government Act. When we debated whether the correct word was "promote" or "encourage", the same points were made. Therefore, I ought to stand corrected and say that I would want to adopt the wording "intended to promote" or "intention to promote". I accept my hon. Friend's point, just as I accepted it in relation to clause 28. Nevertheless, provided that one establishes that the purpose of a conversation is to promote dog fights or any other type of animal fights, it should be brought within the offences that can be committed under the Act. It is for those reasons that I support the hon. Member for Leyton. although I say once again that, if it is necessary to withdraw the amendments to devise a better form of wording for consideration by another place, that would be a better course of action.

10.45 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hogg): This has been an interesting debate, in which there has been much unanimity. You, Madam Deputy Speaker, have permitted a certain laxity by allowing various points to be raised that did not fall narrowly within the two selected amendments. It may be helpful if I respond briefly to one of them. It relates to the ownership and transportation of dogs and was raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), for Winchester (Mr. Browne), and for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway).

I have considerable difficulties, both in principle and in practice, with the concept of banning imports or ownership of certain classes of dog. It is a mistake to suppose that only American pit bull terriers are fighting dogs; that is not so. A variety of dogs can be and have been used for fighting. One example is the Staffordshire bull terrier.

My history master at school had a beastly little dog which he called the hog dog. I do not know who its mother and father were, but they came from quite distinct breeds. It was a nasty little beast and plainly a fighting dog. My point is that if one prohibits imports of American pit bull terriers, one must in all conscience extend the ban to all other classes of fighting dogs. There then arises the interesting question of mongrels, which are perfectly capable of being fighting dogs because they might have inherited part of their mother's or father's disposition. There would be a difficulty in having an extensive ban.

Another difficulty is that, in banning imports of fighting dogs, one would probably also have to ban the ownership and private breeding of them, for two reasons. First, if one did not do that, one would breach the Treaty of Rome. Secondly, it would not be right in principle. Yet I understand that some people want to possess pit bull terriers or Staffordshire bull terriers as pets; for all I know, some may make very agreeable pets. I would be slow to support a prohibition on the private ownership of such animals.

Mr. Cohen: The Minister is making some interesting points, but the logic of his argument seems to be that specific licensing should be brought in for the ownership of American pit bull terriers as with, for example, the ownership of firearms. Someone who breaches the conditions may not be allowed to own a firearm. Is that what the Minister is saying?

Mr. Hogg: It is impossible to establish a licensing system without bureaucracy, tests, criteria, people to administer the system, and the payment of fees. Before long there would be a statutory consultative committee, a class 1 certificate, a class 2 certificate and so forth. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point but I recoil from it, having spent many days in the Standing Committee on the Firearms Bill discussing similar questions. I certainly would not support the idea of a class 1 certificate for the ownership of a dog.

Mr. Wilshire: If my hon. Friend is looking for a definition of pit bull terriers, I can offer him one. They differ from other dogs in having jaws that lock on their victims with 1,800 lbs of pressure. Perhaps my hon. Friend could find a bureaucrat who would go around offering his arm to see whether the dog locked its jaws on him. That would provide him with his definition.

Mr. Hogg: That is a very interesting point, but it is not a definition; it is a characteristic. What happens when the dog is a cross breed which may have that characteristic, but does not satisfy any other element within the definition?

Mr. Greg Knight: Like my hon. Friend the Minister, I do not believe in excessive and unnecessary bureaucracy. I ask him, however, not to be so immediately dismissive of the point made by the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen). Of course, a licensing system exists under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 which empowers the

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district authority to grant or refuse a licence. It may not be as costly to introduce a licensing system as my hon. Friend suggested.

Mr. Hogg: I fancy that if I go on talking about imports of these animals for much longer I shall be called to order by you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Let me just say, however, that I was not being cavalier about the suggestion of the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen). In the end, we are all paid for our opinions, not for our doubts, although I can see that quite a nice little argument could be constructed along the lines suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight). Ultimately, we are all here to say whether we think that this is right or wrong.

I do not wish to contemplate an elaborate bureaucracy to determine whether Miss A or Mr. B should possess a particular kind of dog. That kind of control is disproportionate to the mischief that we are seeking to prevent and, as it would, in my judgment, inevitably involve the police, I have to say that I would consider it a misdeployment of police resources. I am not being cavalier. I am expressing my considered, concluded view.

Having said that—with the greatest respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North, but not wishing to trespass further on your patience, Madam Deputy Speaker—I shall proceed to the amendments. I feel that they are of some importance. There are two elements within them: knowledge and promotion. What is being suggested—although the language is not quite along these lines—is that we should make it an offence knowingly to promote the holding of a dog fight or another animal fight. For our present purposes, we would have to contemplate both.

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice), who used the word "promote". I had already written the word in my notes before he touched on it. That is what we are seeking to strike at. I hope that the hon. Member for Leyton will forgive me if I say that I consider the word "advertising" too wide.

The first element that we must consider is the extent to which the activity of knowingly promoting is already covered by existing legislation. If we are merely duplicating existing law, we are wasting our time. We also have to consider whether, if we are not duplicating our provision, is right in principle and likely to get through. The hon. Member for Leyton referred to section 1(1)(c) of the Protection of Animals Act 1911, which makes it an offence to

"cause, procure, or assist at the fighting or baiting of any animal",

or to

"keep, use, manage, or act or assist in the management of, any premises . . . for the purpose, or partly for the purpose, of fighting or baiting any animal".

The word "procure" strikes me as the most apt to include the kind of activity that has been referred to in the debate. In many cases, "procure" includes promotion.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North referred to word of mouth. If someone goes along to a public house and says that there is to be a dog fight at a particular junction on a motorway, that probably falls within the concept of procuring—not certainly, but probably. If an advertisement is put up on a card in a public house saying, "Come along to the annual general meeting of whatever, wherever", that again is probably procurement. The person responsible is certainly in danger of being charged with conspiracy.

That is the second point that I wanted to make. When two or more people agree to promote the undertaking of an unlawful activity, they are guilty of conspiracy. I can easily see how, in carrying out an advertising campaign to promote a particular activity of this kind, a person would be committing the offence of conspiracy. Existing law probably covers many of the activities that we are seeking to outlaw. I rely very much on the use of the conspiracy laws and on the definition of the offence in section 1(1)(c) of the 1911 Act.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) is right when he says that there is already considerable practical control in the hands of newspaper advertising managers. If an advertising manager received an advertisement which, on the face of it, appears to be an encouragement to an unlawful activity, it would be perfectly within his capacity—advertising managers are not naive in this respect—to say, "This is intolerable, and I will not have it in my family newspaper."

I suspect, however, that there is a residue of cases that is not covered by the existing law. Let me put that differently. Even if it is so covered, there is some doubt, and there is in any case the problem of proof. I feel, therefore, that, in view of what has been said there is some merit in looking at the law again to see whether we need to modify it.

There are other considerations, however. First—as the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) may well find—private Members' Bills are fragile vessels. If we try to put too much into them, we find that we lose the lot. A prohibition directed at promotion could be unacceptable to the national or the local press. We must construct an offence that is broadly acceptable in this place and in another place. If we do not do that, the ship will hit a rock and sink. I am therefore not concerned exclusively with the merit of what has been debated, although it is important. I am also concerned with the effect of such a change on the Bill.

I shall consider whether it is a good thing to introduce into the Protection of Animals Act 1911 a prohibition directed against an offence of "knowingly to promote". I shall explore the merit of doing that in the abstract, but I shall also consider the pragmatic argument whether the inclusion of such a change would threaten the Bill's viability. It is common ground that it would be a misfortune if, out of a sense of undue purity or ambition, we included something that sank the Bill.

11 am

Mr. Harry Greenway: When my hon. Friend considers the pragmatic aspects, will he take account of the fact that advertisements can be a valuable source of intelligence to the police and the Royal Society for the Protection of Animals when they are trying to detect when and where fights take place?

Mr. Hogg: That is an extremely interesting argument and it lives up to my high expectations of my hon. Friend. I understand that the fact that someone promotes an activity at a certain place enables the police or the RSPCA to make useful arrests. That is an undoubted plus, but my hon. Friend will accept that the activity of knowingly promoting is pretty distasteful and will result in the

holding of many dog fights which will not be attended by the police or the RSPCA and, therefore, will be fights in which animals are injured. We have to make a decision on balance. There is no question about the principle. It is entirely a matter for pragmatic decision making.

If we made a change such as is proposed, I would wish to consider the views of the police and the RSPCA. To do otherwise would be foolish. I should also wish to draw attention to the argument advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway). I shall take account of his argument, but my inclination is that his argument is not so conclusive as to lead me to think that we should allow people knowingly to promote these activities if, having regard to the other considerations that I have mentioned, it would be wrong to do so.

The hon. Member for Leyton, supported by my hon. Friends the Members for Winchester, for Spelthorne, for Ealing, North and for Derby, North raised a powerful argument in favour of our considering whether we should create an offence of knowingly promoting dog fighting. We must get the definitions right. It is important to ensure that the only offence is the one which involves the necessary knowledge. There cannot be an absolute ban for the reasons that the hon. Member for Birmingham Erdington would be ready to advance. The mental element of "knowingly" must be incorporated into the offence.

We also have to take account of the pragmatic consideration of whether the inclusion of such an amendment would imperil the Bill. If it would imperil the Bill, we should not pursue it. I hope that, on the basis of such an approach, the hon. Member for Leyton will feel able to withdraw his amendment. We were sorry that his third appearance in Committee was so rudely interrupted. My recollection is that, with such a notable omission, the morning's business proceeded with unusual dispatch. The hon. Gentleman has made a serious point which I respect. It merits serious attention and he may feel that, in view of what I have said, he need not press his amendment to a Division.

Mr. Cohen: This has been a constructive debate and I am grateful for the support that the amendment has received. Some appallingly sickening examples of what we are trying to prevent have been given, notably by the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire). He is right: we are talking about big money. These are savage and barbaric activities which demand action. I take the point about my not having got the wording right. I would welcome any improvement in that respect.

Much advertising is going on. The article in *The Guardian* of 16 February, to which the hon. Member for Spelthorne referred and which reported bets of up to £50,000, also reported that the RSPCA said that a ring had its own magazine and videos. I hope that they would be covered by my amendment or a similar one.

I understand what the Minister said about the importation of pit bull terriers. We have three choices. First, we can ban them. They are the type of dog principally involved. Since their importation was allowed in the early 1970s, the amount of dog fighting has increased substantially. It is all very well for the Minister to say that other animals can be involved. That is true, but pit bull terriers are most commonly used. Secondly, we could license ownership, thus controlling how the dogs are used. The hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) was right when he said that such a course would not be bureaucratically difficult. Thirdly, we can do nothing, in which case the fighting will continue. I have presented a Bill proposing that the importation of such dogs be banned, but I would not object to licensing. It would be quite wrong, however, to do nothing. I am sure that we shall return to this matter.

The hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) made an interesting and legitimate point about intelligence and the ability of the RSPCA and the police to bring dog fighters to book. The hon. Gentleman would have a point, if he was suggesting that fighting would go underground because we took action against advertisements, but it is already underground.

Mr. Greg Knight: Badgers are underground.

Mr. Cohen: As the hon. Gentleman says, badgers are already underground. We shall deal with that point later.

These activities are already underground because they are illegal. Advertising will go on as long as the activity goes on, so there will still be opportunities for intelligence. If we allow advertising, we effectively allow the fight to take place, even though it is illegal. As the Minister rightly pointed out, more fights then take place than would take place if there were a block on advertising.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's point about intelligence, but we can take a stronger line. We must keep strong intelligence networks in the police and the RSPCA, but we can take a stronger line on the advertising and not destroy the intelligence aspect. I am not sure whether that will allay the hon. Gentleman's fears, but I hope that it will go some way towards doing so.

As I have said, I am happy for the matter to be reviewed in another place. I want the wording to be right so that we catch as many barbarians as we can. I am not opposed to the use of the phrase "knowingly promote", and no doubt the Minister will consider that.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: When I used the words "knowingly promote", I was expressing a concept. I was not giving a commitment that those were the words that should be used, but they appear to be apt in respect of what we are trying to prohibit.

Mr. Cohen: I should be happy for the concept to be incorporated, and I hope that the matter will be considered in that light in another place.

The Minister said that he would conduct the review on two aspects: first, on its merits—I welcome that, because an improvement in the law would be merited—and, secondly, on the pragmatic aspect of the viability of the Bill. I understand that and, as I said in my initial comments, I want the Bill to find its way on to the statute book, However, the Minister should not be misled into thinking that the Bill is too fragile to make improvements. Strong processes can be used, and there is a great deal of support for animal welfare legislation. A sensible amendment can be achieved, as the public want.

I am grateful for all the contributions of hon. Members to this constructive debate and I hope that the Bill will achieve the change that I am seeking when it reaches another place.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

11.15 am

Mr. Greg Knight: I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page 2, line 7, at end insert—

'(5AA) The Court shall have the power on summary conviction in addition to any other penalty imposed to order the forfeiture of any animal, equipment or conveyance used or found at the scene of the offence.'.

I welcome the Bill so far as it goes, and I am delighted to see that, for the first time, attendance at animal fights is to be an offence. However, the House must ask itself a question. Surely, for the measure to be effective, the punishment provided by the Bill must act as a deterrent. As the Bill stands, I am not sure whether that is the case. It may be so in some cases, but I am doubtful whether it is so in others.

The House should not underestimate the scale of the problem. Only this week, I have received a letter from the RSPCA which states:

"You will have read recently in the Press how dog-fighting appears to be on the increase, with gambling being a huge incentive to those attending, even though they do not own dogs themselves. The RSPCA has worked, with the Police, tirelessly to bring to justice all those involved in such cruel activities."

I should like to commend the excellent job done by the RSPCA, but it is clear that that is not enough, because of the deficiencies in our existing law. In my view, the answer is to give the courts more power. As hon. Members will observe, my amendment seeks to give the courts power

"on summary conviction in addition to any other penalty imposed to order the forfeiture of any animal, equipment or conveyance used or found at the scene of the offence."

I accept that some hon. Members may be concerned about supporting my amendment. They may believe that it goes too far. They may claim that, if the amendment were approved, an innocent bystander might lose his dog, his car and all the equipment in his car. In answer to such criticism, I would say that that would not be the case. One needs to consider the Bill, particularly the suggested new section 5A of the 1911 Act, which would provide:

"A person who, without reasonable excuse, is present when animals are placed together for the purpose of their fighting each other shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 4 on the standard scale."

The words "without reasonable excuse" would also apply to the amendment, if it were accepted. In other words, the amendment would apply only after conviction. It seeks to give the courts the power of forfeiture.

I accept that some hon. Members may take the view that this is too draconian a power and that a fine is sufficient, but, in answer to that, I would say that power is to be given to the courts, which is not a compulsory power. It will be a matter for the courts, in determining each case, to decide whether they think that forfeiture is necessary. In other words, the power does not have to be used. For example, if the court were dealing with a fringe spectator, someone who just happened upon the scene, I do not think that he would be convicted of the offence. If the court took the view that he was playing a minor part in the activity, I would not expect to see that power invoked.

Some hon. Members may ask, therefore, why I have tabled the amendment. Those who organise such events and take a positive, active part in instigating the dog fights, who are organising the show or intend to do so, deserve the most serious punishment. I take the view that the Bill does not go far enough.

The huge wealth of many of the participants was mentioned on a number of occasions in Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) said:

"Many of the animals are imported from the United States at great expense or they are bred for the purpose in kennels in Britain."

My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) said that he was

"worried about the level 4 penalty that will be imposed."

He went on to say:

"As hon. Members have said, very wealthy people are involved."

He added that he took the view that

"it would be nice if some were sent to prison for long periods."

—[*Official Report, Standing Committee C*, 24 February 1988; c. 73-75.]

Many hon. Members believe that that would perhaps be going too far, but I do not believe that it would be going too far to ensure that the dogs employed in the fights were confiscated and that, if a man had turned up in his Land Rover full of equipment to set out the arena for the fight, that should also be impounded by the courts.

I am also concerned about this scenario. The RSPCA or the police may turn up at the scene of a dog fight when there are those who are merely watching events, but who have their own dogs ready to start a second or third fight after the first has ended. As I understand the Bill as presently drafted, for such persons there would be no power of forfeiture. Therefore, the amendment would strengthen and, if hon. Members will excuse the phrase, give teeth to the powers available to the court.

My hon. Friend the Minister may say that the courts may have this power already, and he may refer to the Criminal Justice Bill, which is before the House, and in particular to clause 68. That provides that, if a court has convicted a person of an offence, and

"is satisfied that any property which has been lawfully seized from him or which was in his possession or under his control at the time when he was apprehended for the offence . . . has been used for the purpose of committing, or facilitating the commission of, any offence",

that property may be forfeited, subject to the safeguards that the Bill contains. Those are that the court would have to have regard

"to the value of the property; and (b) to the likely financial or other effects on the offender of the making of the order".

However, my amendment goes a little wider than that, because it would provide that, where a person was charged with merely being in attendance at a dog fight, but it was shown that he had equipment which suggested that, at a later stage, he might be going to stage a further fight—in other words, to put on the second fight of the day—it would give the court power to order forfeiture. Furthermore, it is by no means certain that, under the Criminal Justice Bill, if I have read it correctly, that property would include an animal. By passing this amendment, the House would be making it clear to the courts that the forfeiture of an animal was intended and was permissible under the Bill's provisions.

I know that when my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) started to raise this matter in Committee, he was properly ruled out of order because, at that stage, the Committee had no amendment dealing with forfeiture. However, in answer to some brief points made by my hon. Friend, my hon. Friend the Minister said that he was not in favour of going around and, willy-nilly, giving powers of forfeiture in Acts of Parliament. I accept

that, but because of the reasons that I have outlined, it is I believe necessary in this case to include such a power in the Bill, and there is precedent for so doing. The Deer Act 1980 specifically mentions a power of forfeiture. It is appropriate that we see that the courts are aware of and are left in no doubt as to the powers that we wish them to have. For those reasons, I hope that my amendment is acceptable.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I warmly support the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight). In a Bill of this nature it is right to define clearly what we are seeking to achieve. I pay the warmest tribute to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) for the introduction of this Bill. This is not a political issue. It is one about which all of us must have received correspondence from our constituents, who express deep concern at what they read about and at what is now, sadly, available on video. Despite legislation about the type of videos that can be purchased, we know that there is a market for videos of these horrendous dog-fighting activities. Sadly, cruelty is very much on the increase; we see this in all aspects of animal welfare and the concerns of those who are associated with it.

This amendment is of crucial importance. It refers to forfeiture of

"any animal, equipment or conveyance."

Recent events give us ample grounds for being extremely concerned about the actions of our courts. The hon. Member for Derby, North mentioned some comments that I made in Committee, showing my belief that people convicted of being involved in dog fighting should be sent to prison. However, I have to be realistic, and I know about the overcrowding in our prisons, so, however warranted that may be in the eyes of many hon. Members and many members of the general public, it will not take place.

Therefore, we have to look at alternative forms of punishment. Fines are one measure, but one despairs at times of the attitudes of the courts. The hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), who we know has a long-standing record on this issue, spoke about the price that is paid for American pit bull terriers. If people are paying that amount of money, they are hoping to recover, by whatever means, the large sums of money that they have laid out.

I understand that today, because the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) has not been selected, we shall be somewhat restricted in debating the wider issues which I am sure that many hon. Members on both sides of the House would have liked to bring up. It is crucial by important to have this point clearly defined in legislation. That is shown by a recent case involving dogs used in badger baiting. Under the Badgers Act 1973, at a recent magistrates court, conviction led to the penalty of forfeiture of the dogs that had been used. I should have thought that that would have been welcomed by those who had followed the case, by the RSPCA, and by all groups that work specifically with the protection of badgers, and so on. However, the judgment made in the magistrates court was overturned by a learned judge. He said that, had Parliament intended that people convicted under the Badgers Act should forfeit the dogs that they used in this activity, that would have been set out in the legislation. Perhaps the Minister can clear up that point.

I was not on the Standing Committee on the Bill, but one of its members was my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), who is not in the Chamber today but has a long history of activity in the House related to the protection of badgers. If my hon. Friend had been in that court when the case was heard, he would have said that it was most certainly the intention of Parliament when the Act was discussed and passed that the dogs being used, in that case terrier dogs, should be confiscated. There is confusion in the courts because magistrates take a certain course of action and, on appeal, the learned judge sometimes says that the magistrates' action was not what Parliament intended.

Mr. Greg Knight: The hon. Gentleman has put his finger on a specific problem. Is he aware that courts are not normally entitled to look at *Hansard* to see what we intended? They have to look at the Act. That is why, in the case referred to by the hon. Gentleman, this amendment would help.

Mr. Cox: I am grateful for that intervention, because it strengthens my argument. The amendment is clearly designed to leave the courts in doubt about Parliament's wishes. If the courts find people guilty of these offences, they will be clear about the kind of action that Parliament wishes to see taken. In moving amendment No. 5, my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton, in his usual warmhearted way, accepted the advice and the assurances given by the Under-Secretary of State. I hope that the House will give overwhelming support to the very important definition contained in the amendment, and that it will be added to the Bill.

11.30 am

Mr. Harry Greenway: It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox). I wish to take a slightly different path, although of course I am expected to speak to the amendment.

When I promoted my Bill, now an Act, my wish about the penalties to be imposed on those convicted of cruelty to animals—including those who promote dog fights—was for fines of at least £10,000 and 20 years in prison or a combination of both. If the Government had been prepared to accept that suggestion I would have been very happy because these are heinous crimes.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Twenty years?

Mr. Greenway: I would certainly have given 20 years to such people and many people would give them life because of the nature of the cruelty involved. It is easy to look at the issue in a slightly lighthearted way, but it is a serious matter. It is part of any civilised society's duty to respect dumb animals and, when they are severely abused, as they are in dog fights, something serious must be done about it. I would settle for doubling the present penalties; that would make an impact.

Those who promote dog fights value their liberty more than anything and do not like being imprisoned for a long time. We know that big money is involved and that bets of £50,000 are made. I have heard of bets of £100,000. The money involved is incredible and most of it is said to be cash. If we take away the liberty of the people who promote dog fights and abuse animals we shall really hit

[Mr. Greenway]

them. My hon. Friend the Minister should bear that in mind when thinking about the punishment of those who are guilty of extreme cruelty to animals.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) on his amendment. Some people have sadistic and unpleasant tendencies. If they tried hard they could curb them, but they fail to do so because they do not exercise the self-discipline that is required. Sometimes, alas, they have not been taught to exercise self-discipline and to overcome sadistic tendencies. Many of those who promote dog fights are doing it for the money. In some of the owners and in many of the spectators there is a very unpleasant sadism that needs to be ruthlessly stamped out.

The House will be aware of my interest in the welfare of horses, ponies and donkeys—equine interests. I was up early this morning and had a good ride in Hyde park on a very nicely kept horse. I enjoyed it very much and I am sure that the horse did too. That was because the horse knew that he was respected and was ridden carefully and efficiently and given clear and kind directions.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My hon. Friend's description of his activities accords with the description of the Government Whips' approach to these matters.

Mr. Greenway: Government Whips give many descriptions of themselves, but I do not quite see them in the category of the description of my morning ride.

There are, alas, some people who will drive or ride a horse to exhaustion and abuse it very severely. Very often the owner who drives or rides a horse in that way half starves it by not feeding and watering it properly and does not give it the right sort of exercise. Such a horse may be taken out between shafts for work. It may be a rag pony. I have great respect for totters because on the whole they look after their ponies very well. However, some drive their ponies and horses to utter exhaustion, having half starved them first. Some riders do the same.

The amendment will give courts the power to take horses and harnesses from such people and, if the animals are working horses, the courts can take the cart or the vehicle that they are pulling. Such powers are admirable and welcome and could do much to clear up unrelenting beating and horse whipping and other abuses of man's best friend. For those and many other reasons I warmly support the amendment.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I shall be brief. I warmly support the Bill and welcome the spirit of the amendment. It is interesting to note that the measure is attracting amendments that seek to strengthen it. That is in the spirit of the debate because all hon. Members wish to bring in a measure that strengthens the law against people who indulge in these bestial practices against animals.

The amendment deals with dog fighting and the people who are involved with it. Involvement in dog fighting is the sign of a sick mind, but it is not an offence that a person commits on his own. It is an offence in which other people are encouraged to participate, and we have heard many of the reasons why people take part in it, including the financial incentive. For that reason, we want sentences that will stop people encouraging others to participate. There must be a deterrent to those who weakly participate in these activities.

Hon. Members have referred to the discussions in Committee and expressed preference for lengthy imprisonment as the appropriate penalty. Most of us would say that that punishment is mild and that hanging, drawing and quartering would be more in tune with what society would like. Perhaps on a mild day, we would allow those people to be hung upside down by their toes in the nearest banyan tree. Sadly, we do not go in for such measures, even for this type of bestial behaviour. We should like the penalties strengthened.

The amendment provides for additional measures. I hope that the Government will respond positively to the spirit of the amendment. Forfeiture of the animals involved must be the first priority. My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) and the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) rightly said that the animals must be clearly defined in the Bill as liable for forfeiture. The Bill should say also—I am not sure that the amendment quite says this—that any animals that are clearly to be used in any such practices should be liable for forfeiture. I accept the point made about the equipment and conveyances used. If that means that the family car is taken, so be it.

Mr. Greg Knight: My hon. Friend said that he was not sure whether the amendment would allow the forfeiture of an animal about to be used. My reading is that it would. The power is given to the court

"to order the forfeiture of any animal, equipment or conveyance used or found at the scene of the offence."

On my understanding of the amendment, if a person were with his dog, which was in a cage in a Land Rover, that vehicle would be included.

Mr. Bowis: I am grateful for that explanation. I might go a little further, allowing authorities to visit the owners' premises away from the scene of the crime to discover whether animals there might be about to be used to commit this sort of offence.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North rightly mentioned the word "found". I should like clarification on that point. Items found at the scene of the offence do not appear to have to be linked to the actual offence. Let us suppose that the offence is perpetrated in a farmyard. The farmer involved in the offence could be brought to book and fined and his animals would be confiscated. Would any equipment in the farmyard be liable to forfeiture? I ask for clarification because we need to be careful about our definitions to ensure that in deterring and punishing crime we do not take the punishments beyond an acceptable level. The courts could allow for the taking away of all the animals in a farmyard, but, clearly, we want only the ropes, equipment and animals used in the offence to be confiscated.

I am very much in favour of the amendment. I hope that my hon. Friends will accept its spirit and move more strongly against this bestial behaviour.

11.45 am

Mr. John Browne: I agree with the spirit of the amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight). As he said, it reflects an initiative in Committee by my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) which, sadly, was ruled out of order. Forfeiture is an important and realistic deterrent. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) has told us that pups sell for £350. I hear that

a top mature dog will sell for about £10,000. If a person waiting for his to participate in the next fight, or the one after, stands by forfeiture, to lose a dog or even two worth £10,000 apiece, even to the people who place heavy bets that would be a serious deterrent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North put forward some interesting points in support of his amendment. His point about reasonable excuse was important and interesting and he cited the Deer Act 1980 as a precedent. I understand the wish of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State—of course I entirely support him in not wishing to sink the ship—not to take too much into the Bill and arouse the counter-lobbies. It is important to give courts the power of forfeiture, and I urge my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State to be bold.

I was slightly disturbed to see the amazement that greeted the comment by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North on what he considered justified punishments. There are various grades of cruelty. After looking at just some of the photographs in newspapers such as the *Yorkshire Evening Post* of 21 March 1988, it would not take long for others to support me in saying that we are dealing with nothing short of torture. They are not fights: they amount to animal torture. Many hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people would strongly support the type of punishment advocated by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North. I say that in urging my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State to be bold in further investigating the Bill.

Mr. Cohen: There is a broad measure of support across the Floor of the House for a sensible improvement in the law, and I welcome the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight).

When the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) spoke about his ride in the park this morning, I thought that it would have been a ride in a horse-drawn carriage. That would be in line with class politics, the Conservatives being the party of the landau gentry—excuse the pun.

I welcome the central part of the amendment, relating to:

"the forfeiture of any animal, equipment or conveyance"

of those involved in animal cruelty, especially dog fighting. It is right that dogs should be confiscated if someone is found guilty of such offence. The hon. Member for Derby, North was correct when he said that some spectators at such fights are no doubt involved in subsequent fights—they may have their dogs on hand for the second or third fight. Those dogs should be confiscated.

In Committee, the hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) spoke of people going by car to take part in animal fights. He quoted the example—it was repeated today—of the fight that took place on the waste land close to the junction between the M25 and M4. Such conveyances are an integral part of dog fights and I believe that it is sensible to take people's cars away as punishment. It may not be the punishment that fits the crime, but it would help to stop the crime being committed again.

I believe that there should be a consistent approach to the confiscation of animals in our animal legislation. The hon. Member for Derby, North has already pointed out that the Deer Act 1980 allowed for such confiscation. If his amendment is agreed, this Bill will allow for such confiscation. No such confiscation however, is available for badger baiting, and that is a grave loophole in the current law. I tried to move an amendment to allow the confiscation of animals to be extended to badger baiting, but that was ruled to be outside the scope of the Bill. I hope that that matter will be picked up and that the Minister will consider extending the law in that respect.

There are many examples of dogs being used for badger baiting. The National Federation of Badger Groups has given an example of the same people, using the same dogs, being up before the courts four times for illegal activity relating to badger baiting. My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) has already said that the magistrates court tried to get the dogs confiscated, but that attempt was overturned in the county court. If those dogs had been confiscated, those people would not have found it so easy repeatedly to perpetrate the crime of badger baiting.

I appreciate that time is short, but there are plenty of examples—I could give chapter and verse—of badger baiting. One such example was recorded in my local newspaper, the *Waltham Forest Extra*. On 22 March 1988, that paper had an article about badger baiting under the headline

"On the Scent of the Badger Tormentors".

That article recorded that those responsible for badger baiting just missed being caught. I have numerous press cuttings from all sorts of newspapers relating to badger baiting, as well as to the people and organisations that support measures to confiscate the dogs from badger diggers. The RSPCA has made a case against badger baiting, as has the National Federation of Badger Groups, the Derbyshire police, Cheshire county council, which has passed a resolution in that respect, the Clwyd badger group, the chairman of the west Gloucestershire police consultative committee, with the support of the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland), and the Badger Protection Society. So there are many calls for a provision to be extended.

A cross-party early-day motion signed by a considerable number of hon. Members was tabled on 21 March this year, calling for the Government to bring forward suitable amendments to the Badgers Act 1973 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1987 to afford protection to badger setts as a matter of urgency. Such legislation should include the confiscation of dogs that take part in this activity. That would put it on a par with the other legislation and with the amendment.

I think that the Minister will use the Criminal Justice Bill as his main argument against extending this legislation, about which there has been a great deal of correspondence with, for example, the National Federation of Badger Groups. In a letter to the Home Office of 18 April, the federation stated:

"the Criminal Justice Bill (extract enclosed)"

I believe that the hon. Member for Derby, North read it out—

"will not, in fact, make good the lack of power on magistrates to confiscate dogs used in badger-digging offences . . .

Our experience has been that unless there is evidence of severe injury to dogs, the RSPCA and the Crown Prosecution Service will not invoke the Protection of Animals Act (which allows for dog confiscation). It does seem ironic that the provisions of the 1911 Act can only be brought to bear when the damage and suffering has been done, rather than at a stage when it is a foreseeable consequence of an illegal act. It seems to us that the greater the vigilance of the public and the prompter the response of the police, the more likely badger-diggers will be able to retain their dogs for continued exploitation and further badger persecution."

[Mr. Cohen]

Clearly that cannot be right, and I am sure that the House would not think it so.

I hope that the Minister and the Home Office will look again at the possibility of tightening up the law to extend confiscation. I do not think that the Criminal Justice Bill is enough. However, I welcome the amendment as another measure to combat dog fighting and cruelty to animals.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As one would expect from the identity of the hon. Members who participated in it, this debate has been an interesting argument directed to an issue of considerable importance.

The central question that the House must decide is whether it would be right to incorporate in the 1911 Act the amendment so ably moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight). That essentially raises two questions for the House to consider. First, what is the existing law? Is the mischief that my hon. Friend seeks to cure adequately covered by present legislation? The second related, although different, question is whether, if the mischief is not adequately dealt with by existing legislation, the amendment is the appropriate way forward.

First, I propose to consider whether the existing legislation is adequate to deal with the mischief described by my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North. The first statutory provision that we must consider is section 3 of the 1911 Act, which provides that:

"If the owner of any animal shall be guilty of cruelty within the meaning of this Act to the animal, the court, upon his conviction thereof, may, if they think fit, in addition to any other punishment, deprive such person of the ownership of the animal, and may make such order as to the disposal of the animal as they think fit under the circumstances".

There is a proviso to that section:

"Provided that no order shall be made under this section, unless it is shown by evidence as to a previous conviction, or as to the character of the owner, or otherwise, that the animal, if left with the owner, is likely to be exposed to further cruelty."

Thus, there is provision in existing statute—section 3 of the 1911 Act—for the courts to deprive of ownership of the animal a person convicted of cruelty.

12 noon

The second statutory provision of which we need to take account is in this Bill, so ably introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne). Clause 1 greatly extends the powers of the court to disqualify a person from possessing an animal. Hitherto, save in the case of a dog, the power of disqualification arose only on a second or subsequent conviction. Under the Bill, however, the right to disqualify arises on a first conviction. Therefore, we not only have section 3 of the 1911 Act in place already, but if the House approves the Bill and it proceeds through another place satisfactorily, it will greatly enhance the power of disqualification, which will apply on first conviction in respect of all offences under the 1911 Act and in respect of all animals treated with cruelty under the terms of that Act. That is the existing law touching on narrow questions of disqualification.

Further legislation of which the House needs to be aware—perhaps the most important provision relevant to the question—is clause 68 of the Criminal Justice Bill, which is speedily proceeding through Parliament. Because it is so important, I shall remind the House in some detail of its terms. It provides:

"The following subsections shall be substituted for section 43(1) of the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 1973—

'(1) Subject to the following provisions of this section, where a person is convicted of an offence and

(a) the court by or before which he is convicted is satisfied that any property which has been lawfully seized from him or which was in his possession or under his control at the time when he was apprehended for the offence or when a summons in respect of it was issued

(i) has been used for the purpose of committing, or facilitating the commission of, any offence; or

(ii) was intended by him to be used for that purpose.'".

There is then a further provision, to which I need not draw the attention of the House, and the clause continues:

"In considering whether to make such an order"—a forfeiture order—

"in respect of any property, a court shall have regard—

(a) to the value of the property; and

(b) to the likely financial and other effects on the offender of the making of the order (taken together with any other order that the courts contemplate making)."

As the House will immediately appreciate, clause 68 has wide implications and covers almost precisely the circumstances that have exercised hon. Members' minds during the debate.

The phrase "any property" is wide enough to include animals. That point was raised specifically and understandably by my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North. A power exists in clause 68 of the Criminal Justice Bill to make a forfeiture order in respect of any animal, including a dog. Moreover—and this is very important—clause 68 replaced clause 43(1) of the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 1973. The powers in that clause covered very much the same ground, subject to one important proviso—that the power of forfeiture under the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 1973 applied only, as I recall, to those offences that attracted a minimum of two years' imprisonment. That is very interesting. Precedent has been cited already in the form of the Deer Act 1980, and it was quite right that it should be cited to the House. The criteria and considerations in place when the Deer Act 1980 was enacted have been superseded by the Criminal Justice Bill.

The Criminal Justice Bill is not limited by the two-year imprisonment limitation. When in 1980, Parliament had to consider whether a forfeiture provision should be incorporated in the Deer Bill, Parliament did not have the advantage of a general forfeiture provision available in law. The offence under section 1 of the Deer Act 1980 provided a penalty which involved a sentence of imprisonment of less than two years' imprisonment. Consequently, the powers in the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 1973 did not apply in respect of the Deer Act 1980. Therefore, to give a forefeiture power, Parliament had to build it directly into the Deer Act rather than rely on general legislation. However, that does not apply now.

The limitation on the powers of clause 43(1) of the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 1973 have been lifted and the provisions have been re-enacted in substance in clause 68 of the Criminal Justice Bill without limitation. Therefore, we can rely on the general law. That seems to put a very different complexion on today's debate.

A conviction under the Protection of Animals Act 1911, as amended by the Bill, if it is enacted, will mean that the courts will have all the powers conferred on them by clause 68 of the Criminal Justice Bill. The arguments and considerations that have been raised today are satisfied by the powers that the courts will possess under clause 68 of the Criminal Justice Bill.

Let us test that. What would happen to a dog involved in fighting? It may be forfeited, if it has survived, under clause 3 of the Protection of Animals Act 1911. However, it may also be forfeited under clause 68 of the Criminal Justice Bill, if that is enacted. What about the car which conveyed a person convicted of attending a —

[Interruption.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. It is customary for hon. Members not to intervene between the Member who has the floor and the Chair.

Mr. Hogg: I was talking about cars.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes. I was listening very carefully.

Mr. Hogg: If you, Madam Deputy Speaker, drove to a dog fight—I am sure that you would not do such a beastly thing—and were duly convicted of the offence, your car could be forfeited under clause 68 of the Criminal Justice Bill because it had been used to facilitate the commission of an offence—your presence at a dog fight. If you were attending the dog fight with a pack of dogs behind you that you intended to involve in that beastly activity, they could be forfeited because, clearly, you would have it in mind to use them in the dog fight.

If we test each of the questions that have been raised it seems that they are met by clause 68 of the Criminal Justice Bill.

Mr. Cohen: I am listening to what the Minister is saying, but, as I have said, there is some dispute as to whether the Criminal Justice Bill will do those things when it is enacted. If the Bill does not operate in the way that he has said, and if a situation occurs such as that mentioned by my hon. Friend the member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) where a county court rejected a request for confiscation, and if pressure for confiscation persists in badger baiting cases, will the Minister give a commitment to the House that he will bring forward legislation to give effect to what he has said?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Member has asked two questions. First, he asked whether clause 68 will have the consequences that I have said it will, and, secondly, what happens if it does not. On the first question, as I understood the hon. Gentleman's speech, his concern was directed at badger baiting. His fear was that clause 68 of the Criminal Justice Bill would not enable the courts to forfeit a dog used for the purposes of badger baiting—or was it badger digging because there is a difference?

Mr. Cohen: Badger baiting.

Mr. Hogg: Clause 68 applies to property that is used in the commission of an offence or is to be used in the commission of an offence. Therefore, the question has to be dealt with in relation to the property involved. I do not know as much as the hon. Gentleman might wish me to know about badger baiting. I am not quite sure whether it is badgers fighting with badgers or badgers fighting with dogs. If it is badgers fighting with dogs, I should have thought that the dog, being a piece of property for the purposes of clause 68 of the Criminal Justice Bill, could be forfeited. I would not have much doubt about that. Therefore, I suspect that the hon. Gentleman's anxieties are misconceived.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether, if I am wrong on that point all Ministers are fallible we will do something about it. That is a different question. I am a humble Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at least, I am a Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State; I am not sure whether I am humble, but that is a different matter. I do not have within my capacity the ability to give any commitments about the introduction of legislation. It has to be cleared with such grandees as are sitting on the Front Bench now; Lord high Tinky-Pooh or whoever he is; I mean my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), the representative from Whips' Office. It has to go through the usual channels. I am being flippant but it is not in my ability to give an undertaking of the sort requested by the hon. Gentleman. Therefore, I do not do so.

Is my argument that clause 68 of the Criminal Justice Bill is sufficiently wide to deal with this mischief conclusive of the matter? I think that it is, but there are one or two other points that need to be addressed, if only because my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North moved his amendment with such eloquence and achieved a great deal of support from other hon. Members.

I have already touched on the question of precedents, so I can deal with it briefly. The Deer Act 1980, the Video Recordings Act 1984 and one or two other pieces of legislation contain specific forfeiture powers. It is worth repeating that all those measures were enacted before clause 68 of the Criminal Justice Bill existed, and when the only general forfeiture powers were contained in clause 43 of the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 1973. Those powers did not arise unless the criminal offence attracted a sentence of imprisonment of not less than two years. Broadly speaking—I have not checked every particular —I suspect that the individual forfeiture power was enacted only because the general power could not be applied to the offence under a particular Act. That certainly must have been true of the Deer Act, which I had the opportunity to examine while my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North was making his speech.

12.15 pm

I feel quite strongly about the second matter. You, Madam Deputy Speaker, may feel that I argue in a very pragmatic way, but occasionally I feel strongly about things and this is one such occasion. It seems to me that in principle it is not a good idea to incorporate into legislation a lot of ad hoc provisions the criteria for the exercise of which do not accord with the general criteria applied to general powers.

As a general proposition, I am in favour of a power of forfeiture. That is provided for in clause 68 of the Criminal Justice Bill. The criteria whose consideration is relevant to the courts when exercising that general forfeiture power are set out in detail in clause 68 of the Criminal Justice Bill. I would not commend to the House or to anyone else a specific power of forfeiture which was similar in its consequences to the general power but which involved no criteria for its exercise, or different criteria, because, frankly, that would be nonsense.

[Mr. Hogg]

The courts had better get used to dealing with the general power. They had better get acquainted with the general power which provides uniformity and consistency. It is bad business to provide a specific power which is not fettered or constrained by the general considerations. I do not like the feel of that, and that is what my hon. Friend is doing. For that reason, standing by itself, I cannot commend the amendment to the House.

There is a further small point which involves definition. I do not know what is meant by "equipment". I fancy that very few people would know what equipment was. Save in the Factories Acts, I do not think that I have seen the word "equipment" in legislation. Is a watch equipment? Neither my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North nor I can answer that question as it depends on the context. Therefore, I am reluctant to accept some of his definitions.

The power to forfeit under my hon. Friend's amendment is not restricted to those items of property which have been used in the commission of some relevant offence or are about to be used in the commission of some relevant offence. In other words, the amendment goes wide.

Therefore, taking all those things together, and pulling together the threads as I have sought to do, I am in favour of powers of forfeiture, but I believe that the legislation now in place is sufficient to meet the concern that has been expressed by the House. I am also in favour of a general, uniform and consistent approach to the exercise of powers of forfeiture, and I am afraid that the ad hoc approach adopted by my hon. Friend, though admirable in its sentiments, would defeat what I regard as a strategic objective.

Mr. Greg Knight: This has been a very interesting debate, characterised by consensus. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) for supporting the amendment. He referred to the wealth of those who pursue this disgusting so-called sport and to his desire to ensure that they are relieved, on conviction, of some of that wealth. This is probably the only occasion on which I shall support the attempts of a Labour Member of Parliament to attack the wealthy. I am grateful to him for what he said.

The hon. Gentleman quoted a disturbing case. A judge said that, if Parliament had intended that dogs should be forfeited, such a provision would have been included in the legislation. That gave us something to think about. He developed a weighty argument in favour of acceptance of my amendment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) wanted to be here today, but because of a constituency engagement he is unable to take part in the debate. I know that he strongly supports this measure, and I am grateful to him for doing so.

I am also grateful for the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), a seasoned campaigner on animal welfare matters. I am sure that the whole House was delighted to see him riding into town today to offer his support. I do not know whether his yellow socks are part of his riding garb but, like his speech, they are most illuminating.

One of the most famous dogs' homes in the country is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis). He is aware of some of the problems, and I am delighted that he has been able to attend the debate and to offer his support. He referred to the need for deterrent sentences. How right he is. If we are ever to stamp out this vile and evil practice, the courts must have power in appropriate cases to impose deterrent sentences. My hon. Friend said that he thought that my amendment was drawn too wide and asked whether a farmer could be arrested for watching a fight on his land. He inquired whether other animals—by which I presume my hon. Friend had in mind pigs and cows—would also be confiscated by the court. That is highly unlikely. We have to trust the courts. If a court were to make such an odd order, should this amendment be passed into law, I would regard such a decision as perverse. I am sure that, on appeal, the matter would be put right.

I was delighted, too, that my hon. Friend the Member or Winchester (Mr. Browne) said that he supported the principle of forfeiture. It is his Bill. The fact that he agrees with what I said is most heartening.

The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) was a little unfair on my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North when, as a swipe at the Conservative party, he referred to the landau gentry. As he is a Labour Member of Parliament, I have to say that I wondered whether he arrived here in a rickshaw. But we are used to his puns and I accept them, as I do his support for the amendment.

The hon. Gentleman made some interesting points about badger baiting and badger digging, which causes me great concern, as I represent a Derbyshire constituency. I am grateful for the work of the Derby branch of the RSPCA, of the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust and of a member of that trust, Mr. Varty. Together they have campaigned vigorously to try to stamp out badger baiting in Derbyshire. I wish them continued success in the future.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) did not contribute to the debate, but I observed him nodding from time to time. I trust that, despite his silence, his nods can be taken to mean that he supports the amendment.

My hon. Friend the Minister is a formidable advocate. I now know what he meant by his earlier reference to a hog dog. He referred to the existing law and rightly cited the 1911 Act and the power under the Bill to disqualify a person from keeping a dog. His most telling points came when he referred to clause 68 of the Criminal Justice Bill. I alluded to that legislation in my opening remarks and I am aware of the wide powers that it gives.

My hon. Friend the Minister made some fair points in that regard. I am heartened to have his assurance that the word "property" includes animals, and he made a convincing case that the present law is adequate. However, I still have doubts, not about the accuracy of my hon. Friend's speech or his points concerning the Criminal Justice Bill, but about whether the courts will use to the full the powers which that Bill provides. That is a matter which those of us concerned with animal welfare will wish to keep under review.

My hon. Friend referred also to the drafting of my amendment and to my use of the word "equipment", which he thought went rather wide. He asked whether his watch would be thought of as equipment. I would argue that it would if used, say, to time the length of a dog fight or how long it took one dog to break the jaw of another. If a watch is used for the purpose of assisting betting or the furtherance of a dog fight, it should be included in the definition of equipment; what is wrong with that? I make

no apology for drafting the amendment in the widest possible terms. Dog fighting is a vile practice and anything the House can do to stamp it out and to ensure that those who participate are punished by the courts will be warmly welcomed the length and breadth of the country.

However, I am conscious of the comments made by my hon. Friend the Minister in relation to the previous amendment, when he said that private Members' Bills are fragile vessels.

Mr. Corbett: They are fragile as flagships sometimes prove to be.

Mr. Knight: I believe that this measure has the widespread support of the House and I do not wish its progress to be impeded by the addition of new clauses or amendments that are regarded in some quarters as being superfluous. I say to my hon. Friend that those of us who are concerned and who pursue animal welfare matters in this House will be keeping a close watch on the situation. If we feel that the powers available to the courts are not being used, we shall return and present other measures to ensure that the courts use those powers fully. However, on the basis of what my hon. Friend has told the House today, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

12.28 pm

Mr. John Browne: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I am pleased to introduce legislation which, if it becomes law, will do something to improve the lot of animals in our country. I take this opportunity of thanking my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and the civil servants in the Home Office and the Scottish Office, who have been of tremendous help to me in all aspects of steering through this Bill.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has been especially constructive in his flexibility, not least in Committee, when he accepted a substantial increase in the level of fines for attendance at dog fights. He has exhibited his flexibility again today in promising to consider further the amendments of the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) and of my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight). One does not always find the Government and Ministers so willing to be flexible, and it is a tribute to my hon. Friend that he has been so disposed.

I thank also the Clerks of the House, who have been magnificent in helping me with procedure and drafting, and who very speedily drafted manuscript amendments at Committee stage. I thank the RSPCA for all its help, and for educating me and other members of the Committee. Some of the eduction was nothing short of revolting, but it was entirely necessary for us to understand the depths of depravity reached in these so-called sports.

I also thank those right hon. and hon. Members who have supported the Bill, especially those who served for three days on the Committee. I particularly mention the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) who steered the Opposition so constructively, and the hon. Member for Leyton, whose long but valuable and well-meant contributions have added to the strength of the Bill.

I thank again my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, who even gave up the chance of attending the unveiling of a portrait of his father, Lord Hailsham, in the other place to be present in Committee. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) for his initiatives on the advertising clause, which led to the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Leyton, and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), who put considerable force behind the idea of increasing fines for attendance at these events. Lastly, I thank my Whip my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Durant), who—in true John Pele style—has been a compassionate guide and supporter.

We are dealing here with what some people call dumb animals. I agree that animals do not speak in conventional language as we understand it, but they are far from dumb. Animals are in the main highly intelligent, very sensitive and much more noble than mankind. Our countrymen have the name—and, I believe, the habit—of animal lovers, but cruelty nevertheless exists.

There are three basic types of cruelty to animals. First, owners may give their pets the wrong food or environment out of sheer ignorance. None the less, that is still cruelty. Secondly, there is neglect. People leave their dogs in parked cars on a hot summer's day with the windows shut. A dog, in its fur coat, is thus reduced to a state of oppression and torment. Finally, there is a grade of cruelty that I term calculated, and in many instances near to torture. Examples are animal fights and baiting, from which there is no escape. The animals experience long-drawn-out, unnatural suffering, and many are tortured unto death.

What does this awful practice achieve? Apparently, it is done for some base, bent thrill, and for money. It is quite disgusting. But not only does cruelty exist in our country; sadly, it is on the increase. Home Office statistics show that, in 1980, 809 cases were brought under the Protection of Animals Act 1911, which the Bill seeks to amend. In 1986, the figure had risen to 1,026, an increase of some 25 per cent. What is worse is that the recorded statistics are probably only the tip of an iceberg of cruelty, neglect and torture. The RSPCA, for example, has long emphasised the amount of cruelty to animals that is extremely difficult to prosecute. For those who would like a graphic picture, to say nothing of the awful videos, I should demonstrate the picture which appears in the *Yorkshire Evening Post* of 21 March 1988. It is a dreadful picture and will live in the mind of anybody who sees it—and it is in black and white.

The figures for prosecutions and convictions are only a partial reflection of the cruelty shown to animals and they fail to convey the horrific nature of many of these offences. We get only a glimpse of the horror in reports of cruelty in newspapers. Moreover, there is often the compensating relief that the report is of a successful prosecution. Unfortunately, that is not always the case.

That is why, last year, I followed with great interest the successful passage of the Protection of Animals (Penalties) Act 1987 introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), which doubled the maximum penalties which the courts may impose in cases of animal cruelty when charges are brought under the Protection of Animals Act 1911 and related legislation. Thanks to my hon. Friend's sterling efforts, the courts can now impose a maximum fine of £2,000 or a prison term not exceeding six months or both on those convicted of such offences. The Bill was a great step forward for animal

[Mr. John Browne]

welfare and I am pleased that it received the support of the Government and both Houses of Parliament and received Royal Assent.

I and other right hon. and hon. Members are worried about dog fighting and similar barbaric practices. The RSPCA and other welfare organisations share our anxiety. They are also worried by the apparent increase in other forms of cruelty to animals. I am sure that we all hope that the much needed strengthening of the courts' powers will deter many of those people who might have committed acts of cruelty to animals, and that full justice can be meted out to those who are caught committing acts of cruelty.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Although many people will welcome the additional penalties, surely it is the certainty of being caught that is the deterrent. One of the sources of anxiety must be the number of times that people have been caught and convicted but the courts have declined to take advantage of these severe maximum penalties.

Mr. Browne: I agree. If, however, my hon. Friend studies recent sentencing policy, he will find that the courts have taken the message from the people and Parliament and that they are being a bit tougher.

The Bill is designed to give the courts new powers, not just increased powers. Clause 2 also provides greater powers of apprehension and prosecution by bodies such as the RSPCA and ordinary citizens. I hope that there will be more prosecutions which are dealt with more strictly. I take my hon. Friend's point. I hope that those who read the Bill will read *Hansard* and also take my hon. Friend's point.

As seems so often to be the case, the hard work of improving matters in one area of legislation, as was done by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North, uncovers the potential for further improvements in other parts of the law. During the passage of the Protection of Animals (Penalties) Bill last year, light was shone on two other areas where the protection which the law affords animals against cruelty is deficient.

My attention was brought to the complicated situation regarding the courts' powers to disqualify people from keeping animals after conviction of an offence involving cruelty to an animal. The courts are able to disqualify a person from having custody of any animal after being convicted of an offence under the Protection of Animals Act 1911, which applies to England and Wales, or the Protection of Animals (Scotland) Act 1912, which is the comparable legislation for Scotland.

However, in most cases, the courts cannot impose disqualification, except where it is the second or subsequent conviction for the persons concerned. The only exception to that is in respect of offences involving a dog. In such cases, the courts can disqualify the person from having custody of any dog, whether or not on a first or subsequent conviction.

Upon first conviction, under either of those Acts, the person concerned can have the animal in question, which he has abused, removed from his custody, but the court cannot disqualify him from having custody of other animals. There is an exception to that. Under the Protection of Animals (Cruelty to Dogs) Act 1933, where a person has been convicted of an offence under the Protection of Animals Act 1911 or the Protection of Animals (Scotland) Act 1912, involving a dog, then, on first or any subsequent conviction, the court may disqualify the person from having custody of any dog.

Obviously, that position is muddled and unhelpful to the courts. Although there have been reservations in the past, reflected in the Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act 1954, there is now no reason whatsoever why the courts should not be able to disqualify a person from having custody of any animal on first or subsequent conviction for an offence of cruelty against animals. The Bill provides for that.

In essence, the Bill has four aims. First, as I have already said, it seeks to simplify and extend the powers of the courts to disqualify a person from having custody of any animal after having been convicted of an offence of cruelty to animals, even on a first offence. Secondly, it seeks to increase the penalties for attendance at animal fights or baits, for example, cock fights, dog fights and badger baits. Thirdly, it seeks to give the RSPCA and other bodies, and, indeed, individual citizens, powers to bring prosecutions under the 1911 Act for offences of attendance at animal fights or baits. Finally, it seeks to extend the offence of unlawful attendance at an animal fight, to bring Scotland into line with England and Wales.

The Bill achieves its effect, first, by amending section 1(1) of the Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act 1954, by removing the words which restrict the use of the power of disqualification to second or subsequent convictions and inserting words which allow disqualification after any conviction of an offence under the 1911 or 1912 Acts. Clause 1(2) provides that that change is not retrospective in its effect. If the courts are sentencing a person who has been convicted for any offence committed before the enactment of the Bill, the restriction on the power of disqualification will still apply. That reflects the age-old and vital general principle of our law that it should be possible for any person who might commit a criminal offence to know, at the time of committing the offence, precisely the penalties to which he is exposing himself.

In short, clause 1 greatly clarifies the grounds for disqualification and further strengthens the powers of the courts in dealing with those who commit acts of cruelty to animals. That change will apply in England, Scotland and Wales and it will affect organisers, participants and owners in cock fights, dog fights and badger baits.

The second major area calling for further legislative attention concerns the penalties for attendance at animal fights. Under the present law, the maximum penalty for that offence is a fine not exceeding level 1, or £50 on a standard scale.

Curiously enough, attendance is currently not even considered an offence in Scotland. Some individuals choose to use the phrase "mere attendance" and qualify this offence as somehow innocent and excusable. I do not consider attendance to be "mere", because even if it is innocent, it is likely to give the organiser of the fight more money.

Fights are big money for the organisers. In America, they make big money out of the number of people who attend these fights. Although it has not been finally proved in Britain, it is pretty certain that the same thing happens here. I have some figures and examples. A referee can be paid £1,000 per fight. We have already heard that a pit bull terrier pup is worth about £350 and that a good mature dog will fetch £10,000. We have heard of bets of between

£50,000 and £100,000 at these fights. The evidence is that there is big money in this animal cruelty, and I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members will agree that it is our duty to stop it.

If hon. Members think about these dreadful scenes, they will not accept that those who attend are innocent strollers in the wood. Very few people accidentally bump into a dog fight, a badger bait or a cock fight when they are innocently out for a stroll. If the average person came across such a fight, he would be utterly disgusted and either try to stop the fight or, if he were intimidated, go immediately to the police and report the matter. Those who attend such fights are not innocent. They are there to watch these dreadful acts, and are effectively in cahoots with the organisers.

Furthermore, these people are interchangeable. On one day, A and B will be organising the fight and X and Y will be watching. The next week it will be the other way round. As my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough said in Committee, these people have plenty of cash; on the whole, they are not hard up. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) said in Committee that we must remember the value of money. The fine of £5 under the old Act should, if inflation were taken into account, be some 30 to 40 times greater in today's values. It is not just the value of money that we should be taking into account but the amount of disposable income that these people have. Therefore, there is a legitimate reason for substantially raising the existing fines.

Clause 2 successfully addresses this point. It makes three changes to the law on animal fights. First, subsection (1) increases the penalty for attendance at animal fights. Attendance at animal fights in England and Wales is an offence under section 47 of the Metropolitan Police Act 1839 and section 36 of the Town Police Clauses Act 1847. The penalty under these two acts is the same—a maximum fine not exceeding level 1 on the standard scale, currently £50. As this is now thought certainly to be far too low, clause 2(1) will increase the maximum penalty under both these Acts to a fine not exceeding level 4 on the standard scale, which is currently £1,000. This constitutes an increase of 20 times and will be seen as a parliamentary effort to take action to curb these dreadful practices.

Neither the Metropolitan Police Act 1839 nor the Town Police Clauses Act 1847 applies to the area of the City of London, but an offence of unlawful attendance at an animal fight in the area of the City of London is provided for in the City of London Police Act 1839. At present, the maximum penalty is a fine not exceeding level 1, £50. The Bill was amended in Committee to add a reference to the City of London Police Act 1839, so that the maximum penalty under the Act would be increased to level 4, in line with the rest of England and Wales.

Secondly, subsection (2) of the Bill makes a further improvement to animal welfare. At present, the 1911 Act contains no offence of unlawful attendance at animal fights or baiting. The offence is, as I have explained, contained in the City of London Police Act, the Metropolitan Police Act 1839 and the Town Police Clauses Act 1847. However, only the police may bring a prosecution for offences relating to animal fighting or baiting under those Acts. This can sometimes cause great difficulties for organisations such as the RSPCA, which often initiates prosecutions for involvement in the organisation of animal fights or baiting under the Protection of Animals Act 1911.

Any person or organisation may initiate prosecution under the 1911 Act, so the Bill will rectify this anomaly and allow the RSPCA and any citizen to prosecute for unlawful attendance at animal fights as well as involvement in their organisation. However, the new offence includes a defence for a person charged, that he had a reasonable excuse for being present at the animal fight. This is essential, because we have to give proper protection to all those who may have a good reason to be present at an animal fight. I think here of people such as vets, doctors, coach drivers and firemen.

Thirdly, subsection (3) extends to Scotland the offence of attendance at an animal fight. Because the offence is identical to the existing offence of attendance at an animal fight in England and Wales, the maximum penalty provided for the new Scottish offence is the same—that is, level 4 or £1,000. The creation of an offence of attendance at an animal fight in Scotland is necessary because there has been no offence of this sort since the repeal of certain provisions of the Burgh Police (Scotland) Act 1892 by the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982.

Clause 2(4) of the Bill provides that the increase in penalties for attendance at an animal fight in England and Wales brought about by subsection (1) are not retrospective. Again, that is for the reasons that I described earlier, that a person committing an offence must be sure of, or be able to know, the punishments and maximum penalty that may be imposed upon his actions.

Of course, we must ask ourselves whether the levels proposed in the Bill are within the normal range of fines for other offences or wholly disproportionate in terms of the types of fine and punishment that we exact for other and unrelated offences. My personal view is that public opinion is as revolted as I am by such activities as badger baiting and dog fighting. One need only look at some of the videos now available of these fights to be almost physically sick. It is a sickening thing to have a dog, specially bred and trained to fight, enclosed in an unnatural area or pit so that it has no opportunity to escape. Normally, animals in the wild fight over mates or over food and such fights are usually only a skirmish. That is because one animal will give way and run off, leaving the other animal to take over. If it is a predatory fight for food, usually one animal is much larger than the other and the whole thing is over very quickly.

The activities with which we are concerned are deliberately drawn out over hours. It may take four hours to kill a badger in a badger baiting. It is abhorrent. The animal tries to do the natural thing, which is to get away. One sees on these films the people who are organising and running these fights deliberately pushing the animal back into the pit and egging on not just one dog at the cornered badger, but two and sometimes three or four dogs at once.

Dog fighting was almost eradicated in this country only a few years ago but, sadly, it is not only back but on the increase, with a lucrative trade in pit bulls imported from the United States. In order to turn back this wholly inhumane tide, it is essential that the new, stiffer fines proposed in clause 2 be implemented. Only then can we hope to strike back firmly at these cruel and thoroughly sickening individuals and their warped ideas of sport.

Clause 3 contains necessary technical provisions—the short title; provision for the repeals in the schedule; and provision for the Bill, including the repeals, to come into force two months after the day on which it is passed. It may sound boring, but I shall emphasise the titles of the

[Mr. Browne]

Acts which will be repealed just to give an idea how wide is the encompassing power of this apparent mouse of a Bill—the Protection of Animals (Cruelty to Dogs) Act 1933; the Protection of Animals (Cruelty to Dogs) (Scotland) Act, 1934; the Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act 1954; the Animal Boarding Establishments Act 1963; the Riding Establishments Act 1964; and the Breeding of Dogs Act 1973.

To reiterate, the Bill will enable a court to disqualify a person from having custody of any animal on a first or subsequent conviction under the Protection of Animals Act 1911 or the Protection of Animals (Scotland) Act 1912. The Bill will increase from £50 to £1,000 the maximum penalties for unlawful attendance at animal fights in England and Wales; that is provided for in clause 2(1). The Bill will greatly improve the ability of the RSPCA, other organisations and ordinary citizens to bring prosecutions by creating an offence of attendance at animal fights under the Protection of Animals Act 1911; that is provided for in clause 2(2). The Bill will extend the offence of attending animal fights to Scotland, with a maximum penalty of a fine of £1,000; that is provided for in clause 2(3).

It has been said many times that one of the tests of a civilised society is the way in which it treats its animals. All the signs are that our society is far from being as civilised as we would wish, judged by this test alone. Deliberate suffering inflicted on animals is a stain on the conscience of our nation. I believe that the changes included in the legislation will be welcomed by all those who are truly concerned for the welfare of animals. I therefore hope that right hon. and hon. Members will feel able to support the Bill.

12.57 pm

Mr. Cohen: I shall try to be brief since I spoke at length in Committee and my views are well known.

I again congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne), who has done his homework and has done an effective job in steering the Bill through the House. Like him, I pay tribute to the work of the RSPCA in combating animal cruelty. The inspectors put their lives on the line fighting those involved in illegal dog fighting and they deserve the accolades of the House. I pay tribute also to the League against Cruel Sports, which campaigns against this atrocious activity.

There is a great deal of animal cruelty. We are known as a nation of animal lovers, but that is not true. According to an RSPCA leaflet, the latest figures, for 1986, show that in the two preceding years animal cruelty had increased by more than 75 per cent. The second highest cruelty rating was in the north-west, where cautions and convictions had increased by 48·25 per cent. By far the greatest increase in animal cruelty was in the south-east, where cautions and convictions had increased by 177·8 per cent. The figures are alarming. The House must take them into account and take the appropriate action whenever it can, particularly against dog fighting, which has been on the increase since the early 1970s. Such fighting involves big money.

Part of my research when I was a member of the Committee was to look up the word "bait". I noticed from a dictionary that the word "bet" derives from the word "bait". Now betting has a different connotation and it is perfectly legitimate. Indeed, I sometimes bet on the horses on Saturdays. It is clear, however, that the word "bet" derives from the cruel animal fights that we have been describing.

I could quote all sorts of horrendous examples to the House, but I shall quote only one, from the *Waltham Forest Guardian* of 25 April 1986. The paper described how a bull terrier's body had been found in the grounds of a primary school. The paper stated:

> "A dead bull terrier was found in a plastic bag in a boiler room after a dog fight in a primary school"

The body was still warm when the police found it. In the culprit's garden various equipment was found, including treadmills for training the dogs. The report goes on to say:

> "Bloodstains were found around the children's swimming pool and on school tables . . . People had travelled from as far afield as Cheshire and Lincolnshire for the fight."

That demonstrates the organisation behind such dog fighting.

It is right that we should strengthen the law against dog fighting. I agree with those who believe that those who are involved in it have sick minds. I believe that it is a Fascist activity, and the message from this House must be that it is socially and legally unacceptable. We must clamp down on it wherever we can.

I believe that the measures should apply to Northern Ireland. I have a report from the *Belfast Telegraph* of 13 August 1987 with the headline: "Dogfighting 'sport' on the rise, warns USPCA". Much animal cruelty takes place in the Province, and I believe that the Government are lax in not taking measures in that respect, given that they claim responsibility for in the Province. After the Bill has been passed, I hope that the Minister will introduce a statutory instrument to extend its provisions to Northern Ireland. That would be reasonable; I do not believe that anyone, including the Members representing Northen Ireland, would object. Indeed, in the past they have passed resolutions saying that they want stronger measures to be taken against animal cruelty and dog fighting.

Mr. John Browne: My research has shown that Northern Ireland already has related legislation on both issues. Section 27 of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 already provides for disqualification from keeping an animal after conviction for a first or subsequent offence of cruelty. The current maximum penalty in Northern Ireland for attending an animal fight is £1,000—the equivalent to level 4—and that is what we are proposing in the Bill.

Mr. Cohen: I welcome that. My general point was that cruelty-to-animals measures to combat this problem should be extended to Northern Ireland while the Government still take responsibility for the Province.

Although I welcome the Bill, I do not think that its penalties are adequate. Even so, it is good that there has been substantial improvement. Under the present law, someone organising a dog fight can be fined a maximum of £2,000, but big money is involved and that is not a big fine, given that the Video Recordings Act 1984 includes fines of up to £20,000 for an illegal video. There should be some sort of comparability.

Fines alone are not enough; other measures are needed to improve the law against cruelty to animals, particularly as it relates to badgers. If the Criminal Justice Bill does not

apply to the confiscation of dogs involved in badger baiting. I hope that the House will pass legislation that does.

The Bill is a move in the right direction. It gives the right message to the public, and I speed it on its way to the statute book.

1.7 pm

Mr. Harry Greenway: I hope that the House will forgive me if I leave after speaking. I am due to lunch with some mentally handicapped people in Northolt and I am already late. However, I must speak in support of the excellent measure of my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne). I thank him for his kind remarks about me and about my Protection of Animals (Penalties) Act 1987, which I think set the scene for this important Bill.

The central and most important part of the Bill deals with disqualification. It has been a serious defect of our society that people have been convicted of cruelty to animals but allowed to continue owning them. It is a major achievement to have stopped that. I included such a provision in my Bill, and it has been subsumed in this one, which I welcome.

The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) spoke of the need for much stronger penalties, as I did earlier. I hope that fines will be increased greatly if they are found to be inadequate under the Bill.

An important aspect of animal welfare is the need for children in school to be taught to be considerate to animals. That should be part of their religious and moral education, and the sad thing is that religious education is in such a weak state. Moral education is non-existent in many schools for children above the age of 14 or 15, and it is weak even before then. Many children are not taught the importance of kindness to animals. Animals respond properly to humans only if people know how to be kind to them.

I heard the other day of a 10-year-old boy who tied a banger to the tail of a cat and laughed with his friends as it ran away in terror. The cat had to be destroyed after the banger exploded and did it a great deal of damage. A boy of 12 took the claws out of a kitten.

Both boys were nice children whom I have met, but they had no idea that they had done an evil, wicked thing. They thought that it was all right and great fun, and provided some entertainment for their friends. Any civilising education in moral and religious matters would show them that that was wrong. Schools need to deal with this problem much more than they do now. It is sad to say that Britain is no longer a nation of animal lovers—but it is true. Cases of cruelty by neglect and by direct cruelty have greatly increased, as the latest report by the RSPCA has shown. We must re-examine ways of overcoming what is becoming a savage attitude towards animals on the part of many of our fellow citizens.

Animals are exploited for gain, as in dog fights, and for entertainment. People get a sadistic pleasure from seeing dogs tear each other apart. The fact that in 1988 dogs are prepared carefully to improve their fighting prowess is quite appalling. I read of the conviction of the owner of a bull terrier whose dog was reduced to a pulp by constant fighting. Its teeth had been pared down virtually to nothing and the dog had been used as a training animal in teaching other dogs to fight. That is utterly appalling.

In one case, a dog's teeth were filed right down so that it could not fight back. It was taught to be strong and powerful so that it could take the aggression and attacks of other dogs, but eventually it was subjected to one too many attacks and it broke down completely. There was blood everywhere, it had broken bones and broken jaw and it had to be put down. It is dreadful to think that that could happen today.

We know that fights take place in pubs, and a school in Enfield was cited as the scene of a dog fight in a recent conviction. There is a careful system of look-outs, and all look-outs will now be treated as spectators and punished accordingly under the Bill, I trust, although perhaps the Minister will clarify that.

I worked in schools for 23 years and I found that the best way to stop fights was to punish the spectators. If one got rid of the spectators and punished them, the fights dissolved instantly. The fact that the Bill ensures that spectators at dog fights are punished severely will be a major weapon in overcoming this wicked so-called sport.

It is dreadful that there should be so much cruelty by neglect. On some land in my constituency recently four horses were starved almost to death. Their owner did not feed them and they had only the bark of trees to eat. The owner was fined £150 and he got his horses back. The Bill will make sure that that does not happen again. If the owner is convicted of cruelty by neglect or of deliberate cruelty, the animals can and should be taken away from him for good under the Bill. I warmly welcome the Bill.

1.12 pm

Mr. Corbett: While I am happy to congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne), I regret the need for the Bill—as, I suspect, does he. It is a sad comment on our times, although I suppose that as people seem still to find it easy to send each other to an early grave in various parts of the world, it is not really surprising that animals should be abused by the human animal for the purposes of sport.

We know that these events are organised in great secrecy, and that is one of the problems in dealing with them. But the message that the Bill will send out today is that there will now be stiffer penalties for those organising and attending these dreadful fights and that there will be new forfeiture powers which, the Minister reminded us, are contained in the Criminal Justice Bill.

I know that the police force, within the limits of its manpower constraints, will want to respond to sustained and growing public concern over these vile events. Especially in the country and edge-of-town areas where the barbarities take place, I would expect the police, in the knowledge of the provisions, to consider seriously what further steps they can take to catch, charge and convict people acting in an illegal and unacceptable manner.

The Bill is a relation of the Protection of Animals Act 1911. Efforts are being made to build a consensus, so that an approach can be made to the Government urging them to update the 1911 Act and strengthen the protections offered in that Act, which is generally admitted to be out of date. That bid for consensus on animal welfare matters separates the pragmatists from the preachers.

There was consensus between the animal welfare societies and the British Veterinary Association, which was the basis, I am glad to say with Labour support, on which the Government were able to propose the Animals

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(Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 which replaced the Cruelty to Animals Act 1876. On that basis of common sense, Government time was found to deal with animal experiments, and the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Bill was enacted. Many of us want a similar procedure to happen with the Protection of Animals Act 1911. I hope that the Minister, like his predecessor, will be properly responsive when the time comes.

In wishing the Bill well, and hoping that it becomes law, may I quote from the person who made the consensus on the animal experiments legislation possible? In his book "Compassion is the Bugler", Clive Hollands defines animal welfare as:

"dignity—according to animals the natural dignity which is due to them as living, sentient creatures."

Mr. Hollands continues—perhaps these words in part sum up the purpose of this Bill—

"My only concern is the suffering we inflict on animals, whether it be for food, clothing, knowledge, sport or pleasure. If we could learn to respect and accord to animals the dignity which is their due as living beings, then suffering, pain and torment would end."

That is what we all want to happen over fighting dogs, and those who train them to fight.

1.16 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg: This is an important piece of animal welfare legislation. My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) has done a great service to animal lovers and to animals in the way in which he has introduced this legislation and carried it through. Winchester has every reason to be proud of its Member, and I wish the Bill well.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Malicious Communications Bill

Considered in Committee.

[MR. HAROLD WALKER *in the Chair*]

1.17 pm

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): On a point of order, Mr. Walker. I have a copy of today's Order Paper and a copy of the selection of amendments which appears in your name. Mr. Walker. I notice that amendment No. 1 in my name and that of my hon. Friends appears to have been omitted. Perhaps that is a printing error as the amendment appears to be in order. Will you clarify that?

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Harold Walker): The amendment has not been selected. I am required not to give reasons for non-selection.

Clause 1

OFFENCE OF SENDING LETTERS ETC. WITH INTENT TO CAUSE DISTRESS OR ANXIETY

Mr. Greg Knight: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 1, line 16, at end insert

'and such distress or anxiety is actually caused'.

Perhaps I should tell my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) at the outset that this is not a wrecking amendment and I am not seeking to impede the progress of the Bill. As I am sure my hon. Friend will remember, I am one of the Bill's sponsors. However, I also believe in the freedom of the individual and that we should all be deemed to be innocent of any offence unless proven otherwise. That is why I move the amendment.

It would place a requirement on the prosecution, in bringing any procedings under the Bill, to show that actual distress or anxiety was caused to the recipient of the letter.

As was mentioned on Second Reading, the Bill is based upon the Law Commission's report. The Law Commission reported on 30 July 1985 and, generally speaking, its report is excellent. However, I do not agree with all its conclusions. The Law Commission considered the very point that is the subject of my amendment. On page 19, paragraph 4.22, it said:

"One commentator suggested that proof that the communication actually caused anxiety or distress on the part of the recipient should be a prerequisite of a successful prosecution. But we think this would have several disadvantages."

The report goes on to list those disadvantages and says:

"It would make prosecutions impossible in cases where the recipient was sufficiently strong-willed to be unaffected by this type of communication. It would also mean that the recipient would become an essential witness in almost every trial where there was a plea of not guilty".

On the second point, what is wrong with that? Under our general criminal law, a victim who has been affected by a matter that is complained of almost invariably has to be a witness, unless we are dealing with an offence such as murder. Even in cases of child abuse, where there is common consent among all political opinions that the court proceedings can be a traumatic experience for the child—we are taking a step in the right direction in the Criminal Justice Bill—it is necessary, if the defendant requires it, for a witness to attend. I find it amazing that it could be suggested that someone who has received a threatening or abusive letter could have some reluctance to go to court. I am sure that the defendant would also have

some reluctance about appearing in court. If the person who receives an abusive letter feels that the issue is not worth bothering about and he or she does not wish to go to court to pursue the matter, why should the sending of the letter be an offence?

I shall give two examples. Let us take the case of a father who is concerned that his daughter is seeing on a regular basis some particular youth. The father decides to send a warning-off letter to his daughter's boy friend. In that letter he gets carried away with his emotions and is rather abusive and threatening and makes allegations that are untrue. That letter is received by the boy friend who dismisses it as pathetic. Later, the boy friend's mother comes across the letter, is appalled at what the father has written and hands the letter to the police. Do we really want such cases appearing before the courts when the recipient is not in the least perturbed by the contents of the communication, but some interfering busybody decides that the matter should be pursued?

Some hon. Members might think that my next example is rather lighthearted. However, it still makes the point. A friend of mine recently brought to my attention a letter written from a daughter to her mother. The letter said:

"Dearest mother,

> I have been away from home now for one year and I feel that there are some things you should know about what I have been doing at college. I have met an unemployed Libyan who is wanted back home for mass murder offences. We have been living together now for seven months and I am pregnant. Unfortunately, my boyfriend has contracted AIDS and the doctors think he has passed the virus on to me. As I have only got 12 months or so to live I have, as a last fling, run up debts of over £15,000 using your credit card. I am truly sorry for what I've done. Please forgive me.
>
> Yours sincerely, your loving daughter."

The letter goes on:

> "PS. The above is not actually true but I have failed my first year exams. I thought I should somehow put this small piece of bad news into perspective."

Let us examine that letter. The letter is false and the daughter intended to give anxiety or distress, certainly in advance of the redeeming postscript. Do we really want that sort of thing to be an offence? Do we really want cases where the recipient, who is not really bothered about the matter, finds that, because the letter falls into the hands of a third person, proceedings are then pursued through the courts?

If the recipient of the letter does not need to be called to court—which is the position in the Bill as drafted—but, nevertheless, proceedings are pursued, what about the ensuing publicity? There is no guarantee that the identity of the person to whom the letter is addressed will not be revealed in court. That may be extremely distressing to the person who has received an abusive letter—far more distressing that the actual receipt of the letter.

Therefore, the House should consider the amendment most carefully. If a letter is taken as a joke—whatever the intention of the writer; he might have intended it to be a most insulting and abusive piece of correspondence—why should there be an offence? Therefore, I commend the amendment to the House.

Mr. Michael Irvine (Ispwich): The amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) carries considerable dangers. He underestimates the way in which the need for the complainant to come to court and give evidence could undermine the whole purpose of the Bill. All too often complainants, particularly those who have received obscene and offensive telephone calls, make complaints, but when they discover that to carry it further they may have to go to court, they withdraw their complaints and no longer wish to proceed. The problem is that the complainants who are so put off are precisely those who are most frightened, most anxious and most in need of protection by the courts.

The great merit of leaving the Bill as it is, is that the test will be objective. It will be for the court to make a decision as to how offensive, objectionable or indecent the letter was; it will not be a matter of how a particular individual was affected.

The way in which the amendment is phrased:

"and such distress or anxiety is actually caused"—

puts the spotlight on the complainant's character and disposition. It is not a matter of the complainant going to court to give cold, factual evidence. The complainant would have to go to court and give evidence about his or her state of mind and about the anxiety that was caused.

That could be very dangerous. By putting the spotlight on the complainant's character and disposition it could open up opportunities for a malicious defendant to start probing the complainant's character. Questioning could develop in which the complainant was asked whether she was a shy virgin or a woman of the world, whether she was the kind of person likely to be upset by the offending letter or whether she was the kind of person able to take it in her stride and shrug it off.

Such questioning could be extremely distressing. A malicious defendant defending himself could easily use it to make matters worse and to intensify the hurt. If the test is an objective one, the court could immediately cut off the defendant from such a line of questioning and say that it was irrelevant. However if it is a subjective test concerning the effect on that complainant, the remedy would no longer apply. The court would be constrained to allow the cross-examination to continue.

Mr. Greg Knight: Is it not a cornerstone of British justice that a defendant should have the right to challenge his or her accuser?

Mr. Irvine: It is a cornerstone of British justice that, if the accuser's evidence is necessary to complete the conviction and that evidence is challenged, the defendant should have that right. However the advantage of the Bill as it stands is that it makes it unnecessary in many cases for the complainant to face the defendant. It is wrong to think that every defendant should automatically have the right to come face to face with whoever is making the complaint against him. That can cause immense damage in cases of rape and indecency against children. We are now moving, thank goodness, in the direction of protecting children against damage of that kind by preventing them from having to come face to face with their accuser.

1.30 pm

My hon. Friend's amendment would reverse that trend. In certain cases, it would provide an opportunity for a malicious and an unscrupulous defendant to make matters worse. My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North put the case for his amendment very attractively, but at bottom it is flawed; it would be a dangerous amendment to accept.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): If the hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) were

[Mr. Robin Corbett]

advocating the universality of the unquestioned and unchallenged right of an accused person to face his accuser, he would know immediately, and better than I, that with probably the most serious charge that could be brought against an individual—murder—that is not possible. This amendment is wrong.

It is no good, as the hon. Gentleman tried to do, to use the cover of freedom of the individual to excuse all behaviour unless real hurt or harm has been done—never mind the attempt to cause real hurt or harm. No hon. Member would say that any individual is free deliberately to cause distress, let alone harm, to another individual. That is not the kind of freedom to which, in a properly free society, any of us can subscribe.

The amendment means that, whatever the purpose or intent of the communication, if it caused no hurt it did no harm. That does not stand up to examination. The Law Commission report on poison-pen letters referred to the mental element, and in paragraph 4.25 on page 20 said:

"One of the essential features which distinguishes poison-pen letters from other types of communication is that they are sent for the purpose of causing anxiety or distress."

There is no other reason for the way in which poison-pen letters are written. If somebody writes a letter to an individual in which he profoundly and stridently disagrees with the opinions or actions of that individual, puts an address on the letter and signs it, it shows that he is deeply opposed to what has been done. But that is another matter. Poison-pen letters do not arrive in that way.

We need to cotton on to the mental element and ask what is the motive. The purpose of writing a poison-pen letter is to cause harm, anxiety or distress to the person who receives it—and it is the person who penned the communication about whom we should be concerned. I say that in relation not only to punishment but to deterrence. I was interested to learn recently that in many cases a trained graphologist has the skill to trace the writer of a poison-pen letter, and that fact should be known. Apart from devising a punishment, we want to discourage the writing and sending of poison-pen letters.

Mr. Greg Knight: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that every poison-pen letter is sent anonymously. I can think of letters sent to cause distress or anxiety when the sender was trying to change the recipient's opinion. Has the hon. Gentleman not received, during his time in the House, letters that were clearly designed to cause him distress or anxiety, perhaps by putting in a forceful way a view different from his own? We must not lose sight of the fact that we are making laws for the courts to interpret and apply. I acknowledge that many letters are sent anonymously to cause concern and distress, but those which are not would also fall foul of the Bill, unless my amendment were accepted.

Mr. Corbett: The hon. Gentleman will immediately accept that I am the most modest and moderate of men and that nothing I have ever done or said as a Member of Parliament would justify anyone in my constituency or outside it sending me such a letter. Nevertheless, I have said or done one or two things which, much to my surprise, prompted some people to react strongly. I do not receive such letters by the sack load, and would not want it to be thought that such was the case. However, there is an important distinction to be made. I have never detected in such letters any other purpose than the author wishing to make clear to me the fact that he thinks I am a bonehead, and that I must be on the brink of being certifiable because I hold views with which he strongly disagrees.

There is nothing wrong in that kind of letter being sent to Members of Parliament. One would prefer it if people wrote politely, but there is a difference between people legitimately expressing their views strongly and those who deliberately set out to cause harm and distress. Perhaps it is so that in our line of work we have, or are encouraged to have, thicker skins than other people.

At constituency level, all of those who have complained to me have received unsigned letters. It is my feeling—no more than that—that that is part of the sickness.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): The amendment is important, and obviously my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) has thought deeply about it. As I listened to my hon. Friends the Members for Derby, North and for Ipswich (Mr. Irvine) I thought that I would find myself in the difficult position of having to arbitrate between two hon. Gentlemen learned in the law. That is never a comfortable thing to do, but, happily, a talented amateur appeared in the shape of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett), and I found the combination of the arguments of my hon. Friends and those of the hon. Gentleman totally persuasive. Clearly there is a coalition between the two Front Benches. I know that I can say such things on a Friday, because usually our proceedings are not widely reported, and the hon. Gentleman's general management committee will probably not hear about it. However, I shall keep a copy of the *Official Report* against his future good conduct.

Although his arguments were extremely telling and sophisticated, my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North will not be surprised to hear that his argument changes fundamentally the underlying purpose of the Bill. I think that that is a mistake. The target of the offence is the sending of a communication that is unacceptable and has a malicious purpose, and at the heart of that offence is the serious endeavour to harm someone else. My hon. Friend's amendment proposes that it should be an offence only if the sender succeeds in causing harm, so that it becomes an offence of causing distress by certain means, rather than an offence of using the means with a malicious purpose.

The result of that could be that someone who takes every possible measure to blight the life of his innocent victim commits no offence if, through some unforeseen chance, the attempt fails. Perhaps, for instance, the letter is opened by someone else, or for some other reason fails to reach the intended recipient. Perhaps the recipient is a person of resilient character who shrugs off the attack, as Members of Parliament often have to do. But, if the missive gets through to a normally sensitive recipient, the sender will be guilty of the offence.

I do not think that that can be right. The purpose and the means are in each case the same; the criminal action is the same. All that distinguishes the two cases is the result, and that is not under the control of the sender. I need not remind my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North that, under the criminal law on attempts—which he, as a distinguished practitioner at the Bar, knows well—the penalty for attempting an offence is exactly the same as that for the offence itself. I agree with the Law

Commission that the criminality resides not in the success of the action, but in the action itself. It is the action of sending a poison-pen letter that, I trust, the House is united in trying to stamp out.

I hope that, on reflection, my hon. Friend will feel able to withdraw his amendment after having heard the arguments of the hon. Member for Erdington and my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart).

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): I believe, as the Law Commission believed, that the criminality is not in the success of the action but in the action itself. The result of the amendment is that the prosecution would have to prove beyond reasonable doubt that distress or anxiety had been caused. That means that, although the defendant admits that he sent the article and meant it to hurt, the victim must come to court and be cross-examined by the defendant or his representative as well as the prosecution, to satisfy the court that he intended to cause distress or anxiety.

Does my hon. Friend really think it necessary to put the victim through such an ordeal? I hope that, on reflection, he will feel able to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Greg Knight: I am disappointed to find myself alone in my view. Being alone in my view, however, never causes me any particular difficulty.

I was not convinced by my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Mr. Irvine). We are dealing with criminal proceedings, and I consider it of the utmost importance to ensure that cases are brought to court only when there has been a grave and weighty breach of the law.

My concern is that, as drafted, the Bill would allow some cases, which ought not to, to appear before the courts. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) described himself as modest and moderate. I accept from my dealings with him that he is a modest person, but I wonder whether membership of the Labour party is consistent with the claim that he is moderate. He referred to a letter that he received in which somebody called him a bonehead, and said that it might be covered by the Bill. I should have thought that the sender would probably argue under clause 1(1)(a)(iii), that the information was not false.

1.45 pm

I can envisage cases coming before the courts when they ought not to. An abusive letter might, for example, be sent intending to cause distress or anxiety to a Member of Parliament who was away on holiday. He may have a temporary secretary who opens the letter, is amazed and upset by it and hands it to the police. Do we want such a case to come before the courts? My feeling is that we do not.

Perhaps I may correct my hon. Friend the Minister. He referred to me as a practitioner at the Bar. The only bar at which I have ever practised is that which he and I went to after long sittings on the Licensing Bill. I am a solicitor, not a barrister. I had the benefit, however, during the Committee stage of the Criminal Justice Bill of listening to what seemed like well over 100 hours of the soothing tones of my hon. Friend the Minister. He is a well-known crusader against injustice. I listened carefully to him, especially his fear that my amendment might severely weaken the Bill.

He has partly convinced me. I think that the best way in which to proceed is that if, as I hope, the Bill becomes law, those of us who are worried lest it be used to pursue fairly frivolous cases should keep a close watch on the situation. If we feel that injustice is being caused, we shall return to the issue, perhaps in a future Session.

I do not want my hon. Friend the Minister or my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) to have the impression that I want to wreck the Bill. I hope that their assurances are correct and, on that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 1, line 16, at end, insert—

'(1A) For the purposes of this section a letter or article shall be held to be indecent if it contains material which offends against reasonable standards of propriety in a public place'.

The Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 5, in page 1, line 16, at end, insert—

'(1B) For the purposes of this section a letter or article shall be held to be grossly offensive if it contains material which the sender should reasonably have expected would insult the recipient or would, if published, be libellous'.

No. 6, in page 1, line 16, at end insert—

'(1C) For the purposes of this section a threat shall include threats to the physical wellbeing of the recipient, his family or acquaintances, the public reputation of the recipient, his family or acquaintances, or the security of property of the recipient, his family or acquaintances'.

Mr. Hunter: I shall employ a three-pronged argument. First, I shall clarify the fact that, although I want to amend the clause, I accept and welcome the principle that underlines it. Secondly, I shall demonstrate how clause 1 is flawed and, therefore, in need of amendment. Thirdly, I shall attempt to demonstrate that my amendments are entirely consistent with the purpose of the Bill and would make it better.

The essential principle of clause 1 —the establishment of the offence— is to be welcomed because of the inadequacies of existing legislation. My amendments are consistent with that proposition. We know that the common law offence of criminal libel is too limited. That argument was fully explored on Second Reading. Many categories or manifestations of malicious communications are not covered by the offence of criminal libel.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) would argue that his Bill, and particularly clause 1, puts matters right, but I shall try to argue that he may be proved mistaken unless my amendments are accepted.

Similar to the inadequacy of the common law offence of criminal libel is the inadequacy of section 11 of the Post Office Act 1953, which, among other things, makes it an offence to send indecent or obscene material through the post. That can apply to some forms of malicious communications, but the offence is intended primarily for the protection of postal workers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood no doubt believes that, in the clause, he has the situation right and has made good previous legal imperfections. Clause 1 now provides for a new summary offence of sending or delivering a malicious communication. It makes it an offence to send to another person a letter or other article which conveys an indecent or grossly offensive message, to send a threat, or to send false information which the sender knows or believes to be false.

[Mr. Hunter]

However, the Bill may not achieve its objective. Clause 1 needs more attention. Its essential weakness is that it inadequately defines each of the three possible categories of an offence. It inadequately defines the terms "indecent" and "grossly offensive" and what constitutes a threat. On Second Reading, it was accepted by several hon. Members that the Bill was not deficient in those respects. It was accepted that it would be the responsibility of the courts to interpret whether an allegedly malicious communication was indecent, grossly offensive or threatening. It was further accepted that the judgment of the courts would constitute sufficient and objective assessment of whether a communication fell into one of those three categories.

I am unhappy about such a proposition. It may be argued that clause 1 leaves the courts operating in a vacuum. They must have something more objective and definitive to which they can refer. To deny the courts that leaves too much room for subjective assessment and may well lead to intolerable inconsistencies in interpretation and application.

A Home Office note which many of us have received argues that "indecent" and "grossly offensive" require no further qualification or explanation. However, I am not convinced. The Bill is too open to unacceptably varying interpretation by the courts. A clearer definition of what is indecent or grossly offensive and what constitutes a threat is also required.

The amendments introduce an element of objectivity and a yardstick of measurement which will clarify and promote consistency in interpretation and application, and the Bill will be the better for that. Amendment No. 4 defines indecent as that

"which offends against reasonable standards of propriety in a public place."

That is a fair and reasonable measurement of what is indecent.

Amendment No. 5 defines "grossly offensive" as

"material which the sender should reasonably have expected would insult the recipient or would, if published, be libellous".

Here, too, there is an objective yardstick of measurement and a comparison with existing laws of libel.

Amendment No. 6 defines threats in three ways, as

"threats to the physical wellbeing of the recipient, his family or acquaintances, the public reputation of the recipient, his family or acquaintances, or the security of property of the recipient, his family or acquaintances".

The Bill would be a better Bill if those further definitions were incorporated.

I entirely accept the principle underlying clause 1, but it is inadequately expressed. The terms must be given the clarity that is lacking. I therefore urge the House to accept the amendments.

Mr. John Patten: I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) and I are at one in wanting the Bill, should it pass its stages, as I hope that it will, to be effective in carrying out its aims. I listened with great care to my hon. Friend's arguments and I am grateful to him for tabling these amendments and for phrasing his arguments in the tripartite way that he did for the convenience of those of us who were listening. At one stage during his speech, I had to go to that invaluable volume, "Dod's Parliamentary Companion" to check that at no stage in his distinguished career had my hon. Friend been a barrister, because he set out the arguments in a masterly way. I am not able to call him my hon. and learned Friend yet, although perhaps, a second, third, or fourth career at the bar is on the horizon. I am deeply grateful to him for putting the arguments in that way.

The words that my hon. Friend has used will not, in practice, improve the Bill. I shall answer his arguments in a three-part way, by looking at them not in the thematic way that the used, but amendment by amendment. Therefore, I shall take the amendments separately, beginning with amendment No. 4 and the problematical issue of how to define the word "indecent". My hon. Friend may recall some debates on this issue in the Committee on which he served considering the Criminal Justice Bill. Nowhere in the statute is the word "indecent" defined. It appears most particularly in provisions that are closely analagous to this clause. I am thinking of, for example, section 11 of the Post Office Act 1953, which lists offences of sending indecent or obscene material through the post, or section 43 of the Telecommunications Act 1984, which sets out the offence of sending an indecent message by the public telecommunications system.

We referred to some of these issues during earlier debates on this measure. I said then, and I shall say again now, that the word has not caused the courts any difficulty in practice thus far. Given that there is no definition in other statutes, to give one here would only create doubts in the minds of the courts as to the meaning of the word in those statutes. I appreciate my hon. Friend's intention to help, but in the absence of the lack of any evidence that they need help, or that they are interpreting the word "indecent" too liberally, I think it best to leave well alone, and I hope that my hon. Friend will consider that as he ponders my reaction and that of others to amendment No. 4.

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): Before my hon. Friend leaves amendment No. 4, I should be grateful for his assistance on a couple of matters. I am not a lawyer, so he need not look it up. The first is that this amendment talks about:

"material which offends against reasonable standards of propriety in a public place".

If I get a nasty letter which offends me at home, and if I take it into my local street market, which is a public place, and read it out, would the acid test be that it offends only people in the street market and not me in the privacy of my home? The second point concerns the definition of public place. What may be offensive in Westminster Abbey, which is a public place, may be thoroughly inoffensive at Speaker's Corner on a Sunday.

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend may not be a lawyer, but he has put both his questions in a legalistic framework. One of the problems of being at the Dispatch Box, with the lawyers of one's party behind one, is that, although it is a relief when a non-lawyer stands up, if he uses legalistic terminology, it is additionally confusing. We are trying to deal with the intent, the desire and the carrying out of an act which is likely to cause distress. It matters naught whether the offence is committed in a private place or in Walthamstow market place—if Walthamstow has a market place.

Mr. Summerson: It certainly has.

2 pm

Mr. Patten: Amendment No. 5 seeks to restrict the court's interpretation of the phrase "grossly offensive". I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke that I see no need for it. As I said in speaking to amendment No. 4, there is a danger in trying to guide the courts when there is no evidence that there is a problem for the courts. At the Law Commission's suggestion, the words "grossly offensive" are taken from a comparable offence in section 43 of the Telecommunications Act 1984, which Act is working extremely well. The words are not defined there, and I am not aware of the courts having any trouble in dealing with the concept. We do not want to set the courts too hard a problem.

Amendment No. 6 is rather different. It does not define a threat but simply makes it clear that the word "threat" includes particular kinds of threats. The words "shall include" are not exclusive, and that raises a rather different danger of definition. If the statute contains a partial list, there is a risk that it will be assumed that the items on the list have particular importance and that items not on the list are not particularly important and do not have equal value. Here again, the courts might wonder whether Parliament was telling them that certain kinds of threat are to be included.

On each of the three amendments, one can pronounce the same sentence, that they set out to try to improve the Bill and are very carefully worded. But, alas, because of the way in which they would either fetter or perhaps confuse the courts, they would not have the effect that my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke wishes them to have.

Mr. Andy Stewart: I concur with my hon. Friend about amendments Nos. 4, 5 and 6. If we accept what my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) said about amendment No. 6, the courts might be tempted to infer from the list that threats falling outside it may not be threats for the purpose of this offence. Clearly we must try to avoid that. I do not think that any court would be likely to interpret a threat in such a way as to exclude any of the matters covered by the amendment. By the same token, there is no reason to confine threats to this list.

In the light of what I and my hon. Friend the Minister have said, perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke will feel able to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Hunter: In the light of my hon. Friend the Minister's thorough and complimentary, if not flattering, reply, it would be discourteous of me to do anything other than seek to withdraw the amendment. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Greg Knight: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 2, line 2, leave out '3' and insert '5'. The amendment is self-explanatory. I seek to increase the penalty available to the courts under the Bill. For the benefit of hon. Members who are not lawyers, I should say that level 3, which is mentioned in the Bill, enables the court to impose a fine of up to £400 but does not entitle it to impose imprisonment. The amendment seeks to remove level 3 from the Bill and to insert level 5 which currently provides for a maximum fine of up to £2,000 or six months' imprisonment or both.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will accept the amendment. The level of fine in the Bill is inadequate. That is not just the view of a few Conservative Members. The Law Commission, which considered the matter thoroughly, came to an indentical view. In paragraph 4.48 on page 28 of its report, the Law Commission gave some of the reasons why it favoured level 5. One reason was that a magistrates court can deal with an offender in certain ways only if the offence carries the penalty of imprisonment. The report said:

> "A magistrates' court cannot make a hospital order under what is now section 37 of the Mental Health Act 1983 unless the defendant has been convicted of an offence which is punishable on summary conviction with imprisonment. Since some of those who send poison-pen letters are likely to be suffering from some condition of the mind which requires medical treatment or other help, it is desirable that these powers should be available to magistrates."

That is true. In many cases when threatening, abusive or libellous letters are sent, the sender of the letter may well need treatment. The Bill as it stands would prevent a court from making that sort of order because it would have the powers only to fine the guilty person.

There are compelling reasons why my hon. Friend the Minister should consider accepting the amendment. He might say that the Bill seeks only to deal with matters that are not so grave and weighty that we should consider giving the courts the power to pass a custodial sentence. In some cases, however, the behaviour is so grave and weighty as to warrant imprisonment. In Regina *v.* Penketh — a 1982 case, reported at 146 JP, page 56 — a woman had appealed for a penfriend and had written to a person who turned out to be Penketh. He began to bombard her with letters and it reached the stage when she did not want to hear from him further. Penketh wrote to the woman's son's headmaster and, among other things, stated that he was the father of her child. He ultimately pleaded guilty to criminal libel and was placed on probation for three years, with a condition that he make no attempt to contact the woman again. However, he repeatedly breached that probation order and was ultimately sentenced to imprisonment which, on appeal, was determined to be nine months.

There will be cases when the courts determine that imprisonment is necessary for offences of this nature. I hope, therefore, that my hon. Friend the Minister will seriously consider accepting the amendment.

Mr. John Patten: The Committee wishes to have as speedily as possible legislation that helps not only to punish but to deter people who send poison pen letters. We feel strongly about this matter, but we must remember that, when legislating we should not simply consider the offence or offences before us. We should set them against offences across the whole range of the criminal law.

The punishments for offences must be put in context. It is not wholly realistic to divorce each offence from the wider context of the criminal law. The gravity or seriousness of one offence must be related to the gravity or seriousness of similar offences. It comes down to a judgment of what will mete out the right sort of punishment — what will deter effectively — and what will not, at the same time, introduce disproportionate punishment compared with the punishments available for other offences.

It has been suggested that the maximum penalty for the offence should be increased to level 5 — a fine of £2,000. Currently the Bill provides for a level 3 fine of £400. To move from level 3 to level 5 is a considerable increase. My

[Mr. John Patten]

hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) may wish to reflect—his reflections might cause him to withdraw the amendment—on the grounds of comparability with similar offences already on the statute book.

The sending of a malicious communication certainly causes distress to the recipient, but we must not make the penalty out of proportion to the gravity of the offence and out of proportion to other offences already on the statute book. The penalty at level 3 is the same as that for broadly similar offences under the Telecommunications Act 1984 and Public Order Act 1986.

We must be consistent and keep the penalties for similar offences in line. On that ground alone, I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North will consider withdrawing his amendment.

Mr. Andy Stewart: In view of what I said on Second Reading and what my hon. Friend the Minister has said, I do not consider that an increase in the penalties is either necessary or desirable. In the light of that, I wonder whether my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) would consider withdrawing his amendment.

Mr. Greg Knight: My hon. Friend the Minister said that a sentence needs to be a deterrent. That is the basis of my argument. This is one of the rare occasions when his eloquence has failed to convince me, and I believe that level 5 rather than level 3 is appropriate.

My hon. Friend the Minister also referred to matters of judgment. I to have to decide, as a matter of judgment, whether I divide the Committee, and effectively ensure that my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) loses his Bill, or accept something as being better than nothing. I conclude that the latter would be the best course of action.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

Mr. Hunter: I beg to move amendment No. 9, in page 2, line 15, leave out subsection (3) and insert—

'(3) This Act extends to Scotland'.

The amendment merely demands that the Bill should be extended to Scotland. Why should it not be? That question was scarcely raised on Second Reading. There is a strong argument for unified law throughout the United Kingdom on malicious communications and the complexity of the relevant Scottish law needs tidying up in that respect. I should be grateful for the comments of my hon. Friend the Minister.

Mr. John Patten: I have consulted my hon. Friends in Scotland who have responsibility for those matters. It is important that the issue is covered north as well as south of the border. My hon. Friends have advised me that the activities that will be caught under the Bill are already offences under Scottish law. It may be of interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) if I outline why that is so.

My hon. Friend will know that much Scottish law is common law rather that statute law. Although I cannot direct my hon. Friend to relevant Acts of Parliament, Scottish common law offences of breach of the peace, extortion and threats already adequately cover the types of behaviour that the Bill is intended to catch. In that sense, Scottish law is a leap ahead of the law for England and Wales.

Mr. Hunter: In the light of the Minister's reassurances, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Order for Third Reading read.

2.15 pm

Mr. Andy Stewart: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It is important, for the reasons that I gave on Second Reading, to get this Bill on the statute book. My Bill serves to plug a significant loophole in the law. It will make it a definable offence to send an article or letter that is either partly or completely offensive, or any such material or package containing an unexplainable threat.

The Bill would prohibit the sending of any information that was assumed to be false, and the sending of an article would also be considered a definable offence. That would cover the delivery or causing the delivery of any such material. Making these acts definable offences would deter individuals from continuing to send these distressing goods.

Such behaviour cannot be considered acceptable in our society. My Bill will strengthen a major weakness in our current law and stop these incidents. Under the existing law, not all forms of malicious communication are punishable offences. It is necessary that they all become so.

Why must this gap be filled? Under current law, poison-pen letters can be dealt with only by means of criminal libel, which curtails only the publication of material that exposes its victims to contempt, ridicule or hatred. Criminal libel does not apply when the form of communication conveys an indecent message or suggestion or when it is in the form of a false death notice. It is already an offence to send indecent or obscene material throught the post, but, because of our ignorance, that applies only to articles sent by post and neglects all other forms of delivery. My Bill would solve that problem and make each of these offences punishable by law.

The Bill makes the senders of such filth accountable to the law. Hate mail has been a common weapon used against our ethnic minorities. They have also suffered the indignity of receiving grossly offensive articles such as excrement through the letterbox, delivered with the implicit intention of causing them distress or anxiety. Our new citizens find it difficult enough coping with the cultural changes without that sort of harassment. My Bill offers the victims a protection that did not exist before. The gap in the law must be filled to catch these vindictive people. The Bill will make a change in the law that is long overdue.

I thank all hon. Members who have contributed to today's debate. I thank also hon. Members who have continually voiced their support for the Bill, as the Government have throughout our proceedings on it. In particular, I want to mention the co-sponsors of my Bill—my hon. Friends the Members for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord), for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard) and for Derby, North (Mr. Knight), and

the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short). I know that many hon. Members have important constituency commitments on Fridays, which is why I am extremely grateful for their presence today.

Many other hon. Members have written to me in support of the Bill but they cannot be here because of long-standing engagements. Nevertheless, I appreciate their written support.

I also thank my hon. Friend the Minister for his contributions and support during the debate, and his guidance in drafting the Bill. I also place on record my thanks to his civil servants, the Clerks and my research assistant Julie Hickman who have all been so helpful with the preparation of the Bill.

I hope that all hon. Members will agree that the debate has been constructive and productive. I appreciate the fact that the House has given me this opportunity and that it will now give its full support to the measure, which provides for the punishment of persons who send or deliver letters or other articles for the purpose of causing distress or anxiety.

2.20 pm

Mr. Summerson: I should like to underline what I consider to be the basic provision of this most welcome Bill. The Bill provides for action against those who actively, rather than passively, wish harm to others. It deals with the desire to harm others or see others suffer ill will and spite. The dictionary that I consulted this morning gave an example:

"Her eyes glittered with malice".

The dictionary defines malice as

"The intent, without just cause or reason, to commit an unlawful act that will result in harm to another or others".

The word is often used in the phrases 'malice aforethought' and 'malice prepense'. Not being a lawyer, when I saw the word "prepense" I had to look it up. It means "contemplated in advance; premeditated" and it is used

"chiefly in the phrase 'malice prepense'".

It is a variant of the obsolete "prepensed" or "purpensed" from the middle English "purpensen", to think of in advance, from the old French "pourpenser", to premeditate.

To come back to the basics of the Bill, its provisions imply an activity involving forethought applied with malice. The person who sends or delivers the letter or article has in mind a malicious act to hurt the recipient at the other end. The dictionary defines "communication" as "the act of communicating".

Quite obviously, the Bill is intended to put down those wicked people who put pen to paper with malice aforethought, knowing that their words will hurt the recipient. It is an admirable Bill.

2.22 pm

Mr. Irvine: I, too, welcome this admirable Bill. */ Interruption. /* If any hon. Gentleman wishes to get up and say it for the third time, I shall generously nod my head. It is an admirable Bill, and that needs to be said.

The harsh fact is that hitherto one very antisocial and unpleasant form of behaviour that caused enormous unhappiness and damage to people's lives has escaped the criminal law. The people whose lives were damaged and who suffered great unhappiness as a result found themselves unable to turn to the police for help. The police are particularly necessary in establishing such an offence, because often quite considerable investigation is needed to bring the perpetrator to light.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The hon. Gentleman has obviously been paying very close attention to the Bill. I regret to say that I have not, but perhaps he will give me some advice. Could I take any action under the terms of the Bill against the person who sent me a letter which says:

"Dear Tony,

I am sending you the enclosed tape so that you can see what a prat you sound when persistently invervening in my major contributions in pursuit of the well-being of the House."?

That letter was sent by my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) and was signed, "Warmest regards, cuddly".

Frankly, I prefer to be called a prat by my hon. Friend than have a cuddle from him, but could I refer the letter to the police under the terms of the Bill?

Mr. Irvine: If the hon. Gentleman really wants my advice on a point of law, I suggest that he instructs a solicitor tomorrow. I will give him an answer for a small fee.

Mr. Greg Knight: Should not the answer to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) be that he should look at clause 1(1)(a)(iii) which states that the information must be

"false and known or believed to be false by the sender"?

Mr. Irvine: I am afraid that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) has had his answer free. On that note, I conclude my remarks.

2.25 pm

Mr. John Patten: I agree entirely with my hon. Friends the Members for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) and for Ipswich (Mr. Irvine) that this is a most admirable measure. Happily, it has received all-party support without a dissentient voice. We should be very grateful for that, and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) is grateful.

We are coming towards the end of our consideration of the Bill, but it would be wrong to do that without setting the Bill firmly within the wider context of the criminal law and of the well-being of the people whom we all wish to protect from the sending and receipt of poison-pen letters, be they from the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) or whoever.

At the moment, poison-pen letters do not form a category known to or defined under criminal or civil law in England and Wales. As has been clear from the proceedings on the Bill, most people would probably have no difficulty recognising a poison-pen letter if they were unfortunate enough to receive one. However, we must consider the characteristics that should distinguish a poison-pen letter, the sending of which is to be penalised, from any other form of communication. That is exactly what the Bill sets out to achieve.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood is primarily concerned with letters which, to use the words of the Law Commission, are written in a way that is

"indecent, shocking, menacing or grossly offensive."

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. John Patten: This is a short Bill and I have only a little time left so I will not give way. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

This is a short, but highly worthwhile measure. As I said on Second Reading, it is time that we gave protection to the innocent victims of hatred and malice in our society.

Our thanks are due to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood. He has given us an opportunity to fill a yawning gap in the criminal law. We must all be very grateful to him. He has presented and defended his Bill with his customary clarity throughout the proceedings and we are very grateful to him. The Bill deserves to reach the statute book. I am sure that I reflect the feelings of all hon. Members when I say that.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood, the Bill is modest in presentation, but deadly in effect. It is full of common sense. It has been widely praised and it deserves to succeed. I commend the Bill to the House and am happy to join my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood in seeking a Third Reading. I wish it every success as it moves to another place.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

SALE OF WAR TOYS (PROHIBITION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

2.29 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I should like to make a great moving speech for the next 45 seconds in favour of my bill on the sale of war toys. I hope that I shall be able to persuade hon. Members to support the Bill. If hon. Members are interested in trying to curtail the violence in our society, we should look at the earliest point at which violence is introduced to a child, and that is through the games that the child plays and the toys that it uses. It would be in the interests of a more peaceful society if we removed war toys from sale and banned the manufacture in this country of toys based on post-1914 weapons of violence.

It being half-past Two o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *interrupted the business.*

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 8 July.

GRANDPARENTS (ADOPTION OF CHILDREN) BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I cannot understand why the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) should object to the Bill when Conservative Members have appended their signatures to an early-day motion signed by 260 Members in support of the Bill. In addition, this morning I presented a petition signed by 8,500 grandparents——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot make the speech that he might have made had he had time to debate his Bill. On the matter of hon. Members shouting out objection, it requires only a single objection, no matter how many hon. Members have appended their names to an early-day motion, and the Bill has to be deferred. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Powell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I seek your guidance? I appreciate what you said about one hon. Member objecting to the Bill. However, throughout the time that I have attempted to get this Bill on the statute book I have not heard one hon. Member, from either side of the House, object to the Bill. I cannot——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I distinctly heard an hon. Member shout "Object" today, so there is at least one hon. Member who is opposed to it. I must ask the hon. Gentleman to give a date for Second Reading.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 20 May.

FORESTRY COMMISSION ADVISORY COMMITTEES (PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 20 May.

SUNDAY SPORTS BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an objection to be taken from a place other than the Floor of the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I simply heard the word "object". I do not know where it came from.

Did I hear an objection from the Opposition?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

GAMING MACHINES (PROHIBITION ON USE BY PERSONS UNDER SIXTEEN) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand that the Bill has not been printed. Second Reading what day?

Second Reading deferred till Friday 20 May.

ENVIRONMENT AND SAFETY INFORMATION BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [5 February.]

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a Second time and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

COAL MINING SUBSIDENCE (DAMAGE AND ARBITRATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is an absolute disgrace. For a number of weeks this Bill has been back to the Chamber, and once again we have Conservative Members objecting to a measure that would deal with serious damage to houses——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House cannot listen to the hon. Gentleman canvass the merits of his Bill now. This frequently happens on Fridays. We are only following the long practised conventions of the House. The position has been explained on many occasions. It requires only one hon. Member to object to a Bill for it to be deferred.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You made a very interesting comment in which the whole House will be interested. You said that this happens many times on Fridays and we hear objections from Government Whips such as the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), who objected to my hon. Friend's Bill.

You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have taken a great interest in these matters as a constituency Member, because subsidence concerns many hon. Members who represent coalfield areas. My hon. Friend was making a valid attempt to get this Bill through, supported by all his hon. Friends. I do not think that there is much opposition to it, but I want to make a point about your role, Mr. Deputy Speaker, apart from you own constituency interests.

The Procedure Committee has been talked about in the House for several weeks, indeed months, and the possibility of its changing some of the rules and regulations of the House. Since this Bill and many others that come up on Fridays, without sufficient time, are thrown aside by Government objection, I wonder whether you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in your capacity as a constituency Member involved in the subject matter of this Bill, and as someone who has to take the Chair on Fridays and hear these objections, you could make appropriate representations to the Procedure Committee, when it is constituted. I understand that the Committee is to discuss the behaviour of Members of Parliament. Would it not be worthwhile to end this pin-striped hooligan behaviour by Government Members stopping Bills merely by shouting "Object" out of the corner of their mouths? That is not a decorous way of dealing with matters——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has had a good run. I must remind him that the Procedure Committee of the last Parliament as recently as May 1987, gave this matter careful consideration and recommended no change.

As to the reconstitution of the Procedure Committee, the hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a matter for me. What he has said will be noted. He is reflecting his anxiety that the Procedure Committee should be reconstituted to consider some matters.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 20 May.

COAL MINING SUBSIDENCE (PREVENTION AND PUBLIC AWARENESS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope it is a different point of order.

Mr. Meale: This Bill has again been stopped. It has become a party political matter. That is quite wrong——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We have given this matter a very good run today. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman should persist.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 20 May.

MYALGIC ENCEPHALOMYELITIS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Last week the hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) opposed the Bill, and this week the Government Whip, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), has opposed it, yet hundreds of Conservative Members are replying to sufferers of

[Mr. Jimmy Hood]

myalgic encephalomyelitis saying that they support my Bill. The Government are clearly opposing the help that sufferers need——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member has made his point.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 13 May.

SCOTTISH CONSTITUTION (REFERENDUM) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that it will not be a repetition of earlier points of order.

Mrs. Ewing: No, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance on whether it is in order for an hon. Member representing an English constituency, Penrith and The Border, who acts as the Government Whip for the sadly depleted numbers of Scottish Conservative Members, to object to a Bill which has wide support in Scotland, a nation where 76 per cent. of people objected to the Government——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must make it clear that on Fridays, when dealing with further consideration of private Members' Bills, the Chair must not listen to hon. Members reciting what they might have said in support of the Bill had there been time for a debate.

Mr. Hood: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. No point of order arises on that. Adjournment—Mr. Dalyell.

Mrs. Ewing: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You did not give me an opportunity to name an alternative Second Reading date.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Lady is quite right. I apologise to her and to the House. What day does she name?

Mrs. Ewing: Friday next.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 29 April.

Prime Minister's Private Office

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

2.39 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I can only say to the right hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Luce)—who is to reply to the debate—in his other capacity as Minister for the Arts that it seems I whistled in the wind when I wrote to the Prime Minister and asked her to answer for the conduct of her private office, as, alas, she has not made it.

It is appropriate that the fag-end debate of this week should be about public behaviour. On Wednesday night the Leader of the House gave figures, to which I have contributed, of the number of suspensions in the 1980s, and the Father of the House pleaded that the rot should stop. Agreed. But the rot comes down from the top.

The purpose of the debate is to draw the attention of my parliamentary colleagues of all parties to the accelerating arrogance of power of No. 10 Downing street. I say of all parties, because there are Conservatives, who in their private moments, are no less worried than I am about the decline of Cabinet Government, the increase in prime ministerial power at the expense of the Foreign Office and other great Departments of state, which would have shocked even the late Professor John Mackintosh MP, had he been spared, the systematic attempt by this Prime Minister to downgrade and ridicule the Opposition, and, for the protection of the position of the Prime Minister, the resort to organised mendacity.

Before turning to particulars, may I anticipate what has been said to me from the Government Benches in the past about my attacking civil servants who are not in a position to answer back. Albeit that Mr. Charles Powell, dubbed deputy Prime Minister by former Foreign and Commonwealth Office colleagues, according to the *Illustrated London News*, and Mr. Bernard Ingham have become, de facto, among relatively the most powerful civil servants that our country has seen this century, their actions are the direct responsibility of their boss; and in relation to Westland, were it true that they did not share their knowledge with the Prime Minister, they should have been moved to other work in the Civil Service forthwith.

As a son of the House of Commons for over a quarter of a century, I sadly reflect that many of us are to blame for having let Parliament down by failing to insist on ministerial accountability. One example, which I know concerns my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) is this: does the Prime Minister realise the extent of the offence caused by Mr. Ingham among my hon. Friends when he referred to a well-liked Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), as a semi-detached member of the Government? I do not think that a civil servant should do that. That is not just my opinion. Listen to Sir Frank Cooper, a former deputy Under-Secretary of State at the the Ministry of Defence in his Suntory lecture. Sir Frank said:

"The aim now is the management of the media with a very much higher degree of central control from No. 10 Downing street and with the connivance of a part of the media. There is now public relations—which I would define as biased information. I suggest that the post of Chief Information Officer at No. 10 Downing street is in fact a political job in a

party sense and is not a job which is proper for a Civil Servant to fill unless he, or she, resigns from the Civil Service on appointment."

If I allude to Westland, it is partly because, having got away with Westland, the Prime Minister and her close entourage imagine that they can cut all sorts of corners of public propriety and get away with it in a House of Commons which some of them have come to despise. The Prime Minister's strategy has been to let Westland fizzle out.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) that leaking against senior Cabinet colleagues has been developed into a technique of Government. I share the suspicions of leading educationists in Scotland that the Prime Minister's views on opting out and amendments to the schools boards legislation were leaked, not by the Scottish Office but on the authority of No. 10 Downing street to promote the views of the Prime Minister and the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth).

I am 99 per cent. sure that the unauthorised disclosure of the letter from Mr. Paul Gray to Mr. Tom Jeffrey came not from the DES but from Downing street and that its purpose was to undermine the Prime Minister's own Education Secretary. As I gave the Prime Minister eight days' notice by letter that I would be raising the subject of those two letters, the Minister may care to give the House any progress report he has on the leak inquiries.

The decision to seek leave to appeal to the House of Lords on the Cavendish memoirs and, by implication, snub on points of law Lord Emslie, Lord Ross, Lord Dunpark, Lord McDonald and Lord Caulsfield emanated not from Lord Cameron of Lochbroom, who would hardly fancy taking on his future colleagues, but from Downing street. In parenthesis, I hope that Her Majesty's Government are sensitive to the situation created by their attempt to overturn the considered view of the heavyweights of the Scottish judiciary on the interpretation of Scots law by appealing to an English majority. Even I believe that that is a hazardous course.

I believe that the decision to allow the bombing of Libya from British bases was worked out with the Americans by the Prime Minister and Mr. Charles Powell without the knowledge of the Secretary of State for Defence, whose broadcast on Radio Ayr that morning revealed how little he had been consulted. I believe that the shootings in Gibraltar were carried out by the SAS on the express authority of the Prime Minister, via Mr. Charles Powell, without the Foreign Office or the Foreign Secretary knowing very much about it at the planning stage.

I believe that much of what happens under cover in Northern Ireland, such as the bugging of the hay yard where Michael Tighe was killed, has been outwith the political authority of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and that the authority came from Downing street —perhaps not even from the Home Secretary. The treatment of Stalker reveals a Government nervous of their own police force in Northern Ireland. Such nervousness is a threat to democracy.

I refer to written question No. 32 of 21 April concerning Michael Tighe, to which the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland replied:

"I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible."

I have put down endless questions on that subject and Parliament deserves a more serious reply.

Why do I believe such things about the Prime Minister when it would never have occurred to me to treat Ted Heath, Alec Douglas-Home and Harold Macmillan other than with respect? Once bitten, twice shy. The Ponting trial opened the eyes of many people. Eleven days at the Old Bailey revealed the organised mendacity of the Prime Minister. But what really revealed the unacceptable behaviour of the Prime Minister and her closest advisors was the Westland affair, the facts of which are set out many times in *Hansard* but particularly on 25 July 1986 at columns 851-62. If they are capable of acting as we now know they did over Westland——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I apologise for interrupting the hon. Gentleman, but I doubt whether "organised mendacity" is the kind of expression that is acceptable to the House. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will reflect on using a different form of words to express his meaning.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No point of order can arise while I am dealing with this matter.

Mr. Dalyell: The last thing I want is to get into any difficulty with the Chair. I refer the House to column 670 of the *Official Report* for 19 April, where the Leader of the Opposition used the words "organised mendacity", and column 935 of the *Official Report* for 20 April, when I used them in Mr. Speaker's presence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will give me a little guidance. Was that phrase used in referring to a particular individual?

Mr. Skinner: Yes, the Prime Minister.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am asking the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell).

Mr. Dalyell: My colleagues would be angry with me, and rightly, if I got into any trouble with the Chair. Certainly it is no part of my serious case to get into difficulty with the Chair, and so I am very malleable in your hands, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: My understanding is that the phrase was used previously in a general way about the Government, and the hon. Member for Linlithgow will realise that that is rather different from applying it to a named individual. If the hon. Gentleman will rephrase his remarks so that the term is used in the way it was previously, as he quoted, that will be acceptable.

Mr. Dalyell: Shall we call it "shameless lack of candour", Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It has crossed my mind that there is a difficulty in the clarification of "organised mendacity" as it applies to (a) an individual and (b) the Government generally. There is always a distinction——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I was most reluctant to intervene on the hon. Member for Linlithgow, because I was taking his time. Now the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is compounding that. I hope that he will respect the time limit. I am sure that the hon. Member for Linlithgow wants to be able to make his speech

Mr. Dalyell: Perhaps it would help, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I gave way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Skinner: I wanted to say that my hon. Friend is placed in some difficulty, because this Prime Minister is the Government. What is the difference between a statement made against the Prime Minister and one made against the Government?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Linlithgow has persuaded me that he is prepared to use a different form of words to enable himself to make progress.

Mr. Dalyell: The Minister and others have suggested that I am dredging up the past, but Westland keeps recurring. No Minister can really suggest that the *Sunday Telegraph* is the house magazine of the Labour party, and I doubt whether Mr. Peregrine Worsthorne and Mr. Bruce Anderson see themselves as trendy lefties. But what did they write on 3 April in their newspaper?

"Then there is Leon Brittan, whose behaviour since his post-Westland resignation has been honourable in the highest degree (though there has been a distinct vendetta tone in some of his elder brother Sam's articles). But the Prime Minister is in danger of repaying stoicism with contempt. Recently, while she was on the front bench, Leon rose to speak. 'Poor Leon,' she said. 'Such a sad figure these days. Poor Leon.' The only crime poor Leon has committed is to arouse her guilty conscience."

How on earth can the Prime Minister have a guilty conscience if she has done nothing wrong?

Speeches flow from the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) on all kinds of important issues, but never a word of "mea culpa" over Westland, and never a hint of exoneration for the Prime Minister's shocking behaviour to him over Westland. We have to suppose that he hopes that she will one day honour her letter on his resignation, which hoped for his return to high office and the resumption of his ministerial career. That hope could not conceivably have been expressed if the story had been of a Trade and Industry Secretary—my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney has held that post—who for 14 days had deceived his senior civil servants, his Cabinet colleagues and his Prime Minister. The Prime Minister's conscience can be left to readers of the *Sunday Telegraph* and to herself. I am concerned about her public behaviour, and her serious misbehaviour to and in the House of Commons.

The sequence of events as recounted by the Prime Minister is, indeed, incredible, for it requires us to believe that she had never asked herself a single pertinent question about a scandalous action which directly affected her Government. To accept the Prime Minister's full explanation, it is necessary to believe that both she and Bernard Ingham had behaved entirely out of character; that she had never thought to ask a man in her own office, with whom she worked in conditions of great intimacy, how a leak of major political significance had been effected; and that he, who knew more about the art of leaking than any other man in the country, had never told her what had happened. At best, the explanation showed a Prime Minister apparently unable to control her own officials, but approving of the use of smear tactics against a fellow Minister—something that has been done again and again. In columns 993-95 of yesterday's *Hansard*, early-day motions encapsulate prime ministerial behaviour on Westland. If the Prime Minister behaved properly, why has not so much as a letter of protest seeking an apology—let alone a lawyer's letter—been sent to Messrs. Cole, Critchley, Peter Jenkins, Leigh, Linklater and Tyler? The only explanation is that the Prime Minister knows full well that the authors' implication of her own gross misbehaviour is justified.

I refer in passing to the bizarre episode just before Christmas 1987 when an entire expensive edition of *The House Magazine* was withdrawn and pulped. For what conceivable reason? A professor of journalism, a regular contributor to *The Times*—Hugh Stephenson—had written in a review of Peter Jenkins' book "The Thatcher Revolution", references to page 196 calling attention to a contact between Sir Brian Hayes, GCB, and Sir Robert Armstrong, GCB, about a Law Officer's letter. Why should that comment, uniquely among all the articles by politicians, some of them pretty contentious in fact, be the cause of pulping a whole stock? The only possible explanation is that the contact between Hayes and Armstrong undermined the truthfulness of the Prime Minister's position on Westland.

I refer to David Frost's interview on Sunday morning before the general election when he asked the Prime Minister four times why she had said:

"I may not be Prime Minister at 6 pm tonight."

That was 27 January. Eventually, she vouchsafed:

"It was just one of the things one says."

Hardly—if one has been in Downing street for eight years and is seeking a third term. Nor is it an excuse to suggest that Mr. Powell and Mr. Ingham can know the Prime Minister's mental processes so well that they know instinctively what she would want done. Were that the explanation, the private office would be the most deeply corrupt form of medieval court, unacceptable in Britain in the 1980s, and Mr. Ingham and Mr. Powell should have been shunted out of Downing street, let alone unprecedentedly promoted in post.

I refer to the Defence Select Committee's fourth report for 1985-86, paragraph 187 of which says:

"It must therefore be the case that Mr. Ingham and Mr. Powell were in a position to tell the Prime Minister on 7 January what turned out to be the principal findings of Sir Robert Armstrong's inquiry more than a fortnight later".

Paragraph 188 expresses the Select Committee's incredulity:

"Yet on 7 January Mr. Ingham and Mr. Powell did not share their knowledge—not with Mr. Nigel Wicks, the Prime Minister's Principal Private Secretary, not with Sir Robert Armstrong and not with the Prime Minister."

Supposing this were true, it would have been a dereliction of duty of such an order that Mr. Ingham and Mr. Powell should have been moved forthwith from the private office.

Mr. Powell is an extremely efficient and politically aware civil servant. Such a loyal, competent man would never have left his Prime Minister in a vulnerable, exposed position by withholding such essential political information from her. The Downing street private office, I am told by both Labour Prime Ministers, is superbly good at telling Prime Ministers what they need to know.

On 2 February at column 852, I asked who brings the greater dishonour on Parliament—a Back Bench Member who resorts to unparliamentary language or a Head of Government who misuses a Law Officer's letter and then displays a shameless lack of candour about what she has done. The Prime Minister sidestepped the question, but it received some publicity. Yet again, I am told by those in a position to know, who I shall not betray, as retribution

would follow, that Mr. Powell told the Prime Minister everything about the Law Officer's letter from early January onwards.

So what becomes of the Prime Minister's crucial, indispensible statement in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) which ran:

"I did not know about the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry's own role in the matter of the disclosure until the inquiry had reported."—[*Official Report*, 27 January 1986; Vol. 90, c. 657.]

I was going to say that that is a lump of organised mendacity, but I had better say shameless lack of candour.

If the Prime Minister had not resorted to that shameless lack of candour, she could hardly have remained Prime Minister and would have been sending for the removal vans for No. 10 Downing street. Perhaps I am an old-fashioned person who arrived here, one of a dwindling band of 35 Members, in time to witness the Profumo affair. One of my formative impressions is that truthfulness to the House of Commons is paramount and that shameless lack of candour is unacceptable. Those who resort to shameless lack of candour should not be allowed to get away with it. No behaviour could be graver than the sustained shameless lack of candour by the Head of Government.

Some people say that Labour Members behave badly. Others, albeit noiselessly, say that I behave badly, but anything that we have done is as nothing to the actions of a Head of Government who remains Head of Government by dint of shameless lack of candour to the House of Commons. The political sanctity of truth to the House of Commons on matters of public behaviour is even more important than physical injury to the Mace.

If, with the acquiescence and knowledge of key members of their private office, Heads of Government are allowed to get away with shameless lack of candour to the House of Commons, the rot in public behaviour will not stop.

3.1 pm

The Minister of State, Privy Council Office (Mr. Richard Luce): I am grateful for the courteous remarks made by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) at the beginning of his speech. He has a perfect right to raise such issues in an Adjournment debate. That is in the very nature of our democratic system.

I admire the hon. Gentleman's persistence and genuine concern, but he shows a remarkable consistency in his obsession with certain issues and a lack of proportion. His suggestions of, to quote his words,

"a campaign of organised mendacity"

or, to quote his fallback words,

"a shameless lack of candour"

on the part of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is totally unworthy of him. He must accept that the vast majority of citizens are, quite rightly, more interested in the changes brought about by the Government and their achievements than in the latest chapter in the hon. Gentleman's campaign to try to discredit my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is widely accepted as a leader of great integrity. Her achievements over the past nine years are remarkable and historians will come to judge her as one of our greatest Prime Ministers. The hon. Gentleman may have reacted in that way because he would like his own party to be in Government.

The importance of those who support a Minister in his private office cannot be overemphasised. Anyone who has held ministerial office would, I am sure, agree that we are well served by those able and hard-working people. The demands made upon those in the private office of No. 10 must, inevitably, be that much greater and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has on many occasions praised the excellence and dedication of her staff. I am very glad to take this chance to add my support to that view.

All unauthorised disclosures of official information are to be deplored. Whenever they occur, they are investigated by whatever means seem appropriate, but it is not the usual practice to comment in detail on such matters. It is sufficient for me to say that the latest leaks to which the hon. Gentleman referred are being thoroughly investigated and there is nothing further that I can add to that. I will, however, repeat that the Government take any breach of confidence extremely seriously.

For a Minister to be able to function effectively, he must be confident that he can trust those around him. Of those closest to Ministers, the majority are, of course, civil servants. We are fortunate to have a Civil Service renowned for its professional nature. It is a politically neutral body. Civil servants act on behalf of their Ministers, not on their own behalf, and all civil servants have a duty to maintain confidences. This is essential and must remain so. I am glad to say that I see no change in this tradition. The same high standards of loyalty must, and do, apply to all who have contact with Ministers, be they special advisers, press officers or administrative civil servants—and whether they hold high rank or low. All my experience has shown that we have a Civil Service with the highest standards of professionalism, loyalty and integrity.

I believe that that would continue to be the case, whatever the Government, whatever the political flavour in office at the time. I am certain that if the Opposition were ever to form a Government again they would be equally disturbed if there were disclosures without proper authority of details of Ministers' confidential discussions. The hon. Gentleman must be aware of the processes which lead to the formulation of Government policy, and that this often involves differences of opinion, sincerely held and hotly debated. Equally, under our constitution, it becomes the responsibility of the Government as a whole.

One of the implications of the hon. Gentleman's remarks is that the Government are not open and do not give adequate information, but the Government have persistently pursued a policy of encouraging Departments to make available to Parliament and the public as much information as possible, consistent with the requirements of good government. The departmental Select Committees were, let me remind the hon. Member, introduced in 1979 by this Government and have played an important role in the parliamentary and public scrutiny of Government. Through them, this Government have been more closely and thoroughly examined than any other, and rightly so. Let me add that it is in the Government's own interest to be as informative as possible in order to explain more fully the reasons for our policies.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Luce: I should be trying to answer the points made by the hon. Member for Linlithgow, but I shall give way if necessary.

Mr. Dobson: Why was it that the Select Committee on Defence was not allowed to question civil servants who had taken part in the Westland cover-up, and that Sir Robert Armstrong was chosen to speak on their behalf?

Mr. Luce: My point is clear: this Government, not the Labour Government or any other Government, established for the first time in our history the departmental Select Committees which are more thoroughly challenging the Executive than have any other bodies in the past. That is a great improvement.

If I understood him correctly, the hon. Member for Linlithgow suggested that there has been politicisation of the Civil Service. That was at least partly implied in his remarks. He is absolutely wrong. When the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee looked into that suggestion in its seventh report of the 1985-86 Session, it stated that it had

"received no convincing evidence that the British Civil Service is being or has been politicised".

That statement, from an all-party Committee, was noted with both satisfaction and agreement by the Government in the response to the report. What is more, the Government stated clearly that the Civil Service should not be allowed to become politicised.

There are, of course, those the hon. Gentleman who claim that Ministers, and the Prime Minister, are playing a much greater role now in the appointment of senior civil servants. They allege—without a shred of evidence—that only those with "correct" political attitudes are being promoted to senior positions. I refute that utterly. The criterion for promotion in the Civil Service remains as it has always been, one of merit—the best person for the job. What may well have changed—indeed, it would be surprising if this were not so—is the combination of skills and qualities looked for in the most senior civil servants. In particular, increased emphasis is now given to effectiveness in the management of resources and people, as well as the essentials of proven efficiency and the ability to provide first-class policy advice to Ministers.

I can say without hesitation that we have a Civil Service of the highest standards of professionalism, integrity and loyalty and a service that remains, as it always should, under any elected Government of the day, politically impartial.

Mr. Dalyell: I am a supporter of the Civil Service. I have not made general blanket statements about the politicising of the Civil Service. I am concerned about the operations of the private office. I read out the considered view of Sir Frank Cooper——

The motion having been made after half-past Two o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at nine minutes past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 12 April 1988

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mr. John T. Saxon

Mr. Allason: To ask the Attorney-General if Her Majesty's Government plan to proceed against Mr. John T. Saxon, of Springfield, New Jersey, for alleged breach of duty of confidentiality to the Crown in respect of observations attributed to him as a former member of the British Security Service, in the recent biography of Klaus Fuchs, by Professor Robert Williams; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: No.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Passport Office, Birmingham

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will give consideration to the provision of a passport issuing office in Birmingham.

Mr. Renton: We have no plans to do so.

Sports (Fire Safety)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many notices have been issued under sections 7(1), 9(1) and 23, respectively, of the Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Act 1987 since the Act came into force.

Mr. John Patten: Section 7 of the Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Act 1987 has not been brought into force. We have ascertained that between 1 January 1988, when section 9(1) came into force, and 31 March 15 notices prohibiting and 31 restricting use have been issued, under section 10 of the Fire Precautions Act 1971, by 12 fire authorities in England and Wales in respect of 25 buildings. For some of the buildings in multiple occupation more than one notice was served. Information about notices issued by local authorities under section 10 of the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 as amended by section 23 of the Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Act is not collected centrally.

Prisoners (Remission)

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases of conviction on indictment he has recommended to Her Majesty the Queen *(a)* a free pardon, *(b)* remission of imprisonment, *(c)* remission of detention and *(d)* remission of time in the years 1986 and 1987.

Mr. John Patten: No free pardons were granted in 1986 or 1987 to any person convicted on indictment. In 1986, 94 persons and in 1987, 81 persons convicted at a Crown court were granted remission of sentences as follows:

	1986	*1987*
Imprisonment	79	66
Youth custody	15	15
Fines	—	—
Total	94	81

ANC Representatives

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in the light of the murder of the representative of the African National Congress in France, he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to the level of police protection he intends to provide for the African National Congress's representatives in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Leading members of the African National Congress were given further advice about their personal security by the police on 29 March. The police have also instituted other measures, but it would not be appropriate to disclose these publicly.

Brockhill Remand Centre

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if consideration has been given to the recommendation in the Chief Inspector of Prisons report on the Brockhill remand centre to the effect that regular meetings be held between the governors of remand centres and prison department officials to identify common problems and solutions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Existing regional and national conferences should normally provide an adequate opportunity for discussion of matters common to particular classes of establishment. But we do not rule out the possibility at some future date of an ad hoc conference along the lines suggested by the chief inspector.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in the context of his response to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons report on Brockhill remand centre, he will indicate *(a)* if routine monitoring of the allocation of prisoners from ethnic minorities to accommodation and work has been introduced; if disciplinary charges are recorded according to race; and if time has been allocated on the essential task list for the work of the race relations liaison officer and *(b)* what steps have been or are due to be taken to improve the state of accommodation and the poverty of the regime at Brockhill.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The position is as follows:

(a) yes, except that the number of adjudications by race is monitored regularly (one week per month) but not continuously; and

(b) considerable improvements have been made. Defective windows have been replaced and floor surfaces repaired; improvements to the kitchen and servery have been carried out and repairs to the activity centre, recess areas, and waiting accommodation for visitors completed. An additional association and activities room has been provided for D wing and day-time association has been increased for other wings. Visits have been extended for 15 minutes to up to two hours.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps have been taken in response to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons' report on Brockhill remand centre, and in particular *(a)* what action is being

taken to reduce the proportion of prisoners who are unemployed and who spend 15 to 20 hours per day in their cells and *(b)* what plans exist to provide integral sanitation and to improve sanitary facilities on the landings.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The chief inspector made a total of 95 recommendations. Many of the deficiencies identified have been remedied. In particular, following the introduction of new working arrangements known as fresh start, the frequency of day-time association has been increased for inmates on all wings and an additional association and activities room has been provided for D wing. Those inmates not in employment are now offered education classes, on a roster basis. The length of visits has also been extended considerably. Remedial repairs have been carried out to existing sanitary facilities and a continuous programme of cleaning and repairs has been introduced. There are no plans to introduce integral sanitation in advance of the intended closure of the establishment in 1990 and its conversion to other use.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in the context of his response to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons' report on Brockhill remand centre he will indicate whether *(a)* prisoners now receive one kit change per week, *(b)* any remand prisoners are still sharing accommodation with convicted prisoners and *(c)* there are now pillows in all cells and fire retardant covers for all mattresses.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The position is as follows:

(a) it is now the normal practice for kit to be changed twice a week;

(b) no;

(c) yes.

Immigration

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many immigration cases have been referred to the Minister of State responsible for immigration by right hon. and hon. Members for each year since 1979.

Mr. Renton: The available information relates to the number of immigration files created following representations by right hon. and hon. Members, and is as follows:

	Number
1979	10,395
1980	10,029
1981	8,945
1982	9,931
1983	11,456
1984	13,164
1985	16,024
1986	17,511
1987	11,842

Notes

1. These figures include a number of letters dealing with general issues rather than individual cases.

2. Representations made on behalf of a single family may be counted as more than one case where the immigration circumstances of more than one member of the family are under consideration.

3. Further representations made after a reply has been sent are included separately in these figures.

4. Representations received about the same case from more than one right hon. Member or hon. Member are counted separately.

The figures include representations on all categories of immigration cases.

The great majority of these representations were handled by my office and that of my predecessors as Ministers of State.

Entry Refusals

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of arrivals in the United Kingdom refused entry at the port of entry for each year since 1979.

Mr. Renton: The numbers of persons removed from the United Kingdom, after being refused entry at a port, for the years 1979 to 1986 are given in table 4·2 of the Home Office publication "Immigration Nationality and Passports—A Report on the Work of the Departments; October 1987" a copy of which is in the Library. The corresponding figure for 1987 was 19,319.

Arsenal Football Club

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to how many arrests there have been arising from incidents at Arsenal football ground since January 1987.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There have been 424 such arrests since January 1987.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to the total number of police deployed per match since September 1987 in the vicinity of Arsenal football ground.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The number of police officers on duty at football matches depends on the teams involved, and the police assessment of the likelihood of disorder. I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that Arsenal has played 21 matches at Highbury since September 1987, and that the average number of police officers deployed per match was 332.

Official Secrets Act (Police Officers)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek to amend the Official Secrets Act so as to provide that police officers investigating alleged breaches of the law or of police regulations shall be authorised persons for the purposes of the Act.

Mr. John Patten: We are in the course of preparing proposals for the reform of section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911 and are not yet in a position to announce detailed conclusions.

Michael Ryan (Shootings)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he received a full report of the shootings by Michael Ryan in Hungerford; whether he sought further information; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The chief constable's full report on the police handling of the Hungerford incident was received on 1 October 1987. My right hon. Friend did not ask for any further information. He did, however, arrange for Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary to discuss

some of the issues raised in the report with the chief constable and to identify any lessons which the police service as a whole might learn from the incident. Her Majesty's inspector's report is expected shortly.

Recidivism

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what he estimates to be the size of the recidivist prison population; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The readily available information shows the sentenced prison population analysed by the number of previous convictions (tables 3.11, 4.10, 5.10 of the latest issue of "Prison Statistics England and Wales", for 1986, Cm. 210, copies of which are in the Library). Table 8(a) provides the information also available on the proportion of prisoners who were reconvicted within two years of the discharge from their sentence.

Rural Areas (Policing)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received concerning the policing of rural areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As I explained in answer to a Question from the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 21 January, at column 785, it is for chief officers of police to determine the most suitable methods of policing rural areas.

Extradition (USA)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many requests for extradition in respect of British citizens deserting from United States of America armed forces have been received from the United States Government in the past three years.

Mr. John Patten: Requests by the United States authorities for the return of deserters from the United States armed forces are dealt with in accordance with the provisions of the Visiting Forces Act 1952. I understand that there have been three requests in the last three years in respect of persons with dual British and United States citizenship.

North Wales Police

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will increase the manpower levels of the North Wales police, in the light of the representations by the North Wales chief constable; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The North Wales police authority has applied for 40 additional police posts in 1988-89. The application is being considered, together with those from other police authorities, in the light of advice from Her Majesty's inspectors of constabulary.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the recently published crime statistics in north Wales.

Mr. John Patten: In 1987 the increase in recorded crime in north Wales was greater than in England and Wales as a whole, but the number of offences per 100,000 population was well below the national average. The increase in the clear-up rate from 32 to 43 per cent. is encouraging. We also welcome the above-average fall in domestic burglaries, and the increase in the number of these offences cleared up following a growth in neighbourhood watch and other crime prevention activities.

Trespass and Illegal Occupation

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to bring trespass and illegal occupation of land and buildings, including squatting, entirely within the terms of the criminal law so as to enable land and home owners to gain more rapid repossession of their land, building and homes.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 24 March 1988]:* The criminal law already applies to various circumstances in which trespassers enter or occupy land or buildings.

For example, it is an offence under the Criminal Law Act 1977 to use or threaten to use violence against persons or property to secure entry to premises against the opposition of a person present there, to refuse to leave residential premises having entered as a trespasser when required to do so by a displaced occupier or intended occupier, to have a weapon of offence having entered premises as a trespasser or to obstruct or resist an officer of a court enforcing a civil judgment or order for recovery of the premises. Section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986 gives the police powers to direct trespassers to leave land in certain circumstances, and it is an offence to disobey such a direction.

We have no plans at present for further legislation in this area.

Racing (Drug Misuse)

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what information he has about the number of cases of drug misuse involving animals within the racing industry since 1979.

(2) if he will introduce legislation to make it a criminal offence to misuse restricted drugs, particularly steroids, in the horse and dog racing industries; and if he will make a statement.

(3) if he has received any request for funds from the horse and dog racing industries to help combat the misuse of drugs on either race horses or dogs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten *[pursuant to his reply, 18 January, 1988, c. 564]:* If drugs are used on racing animals, in appropriate circumstances conspiracy to defraud could be charged. The Law Commission, in its working paper number 104, has asked for views on whether this law should be reformed and, in particular, whether gambling swindles involving drugs on animals should be covered by statutory offences. My right hon. Friend will consider its advice in due course. We do not have occasion to collect information about the incidence of positive tests for drugs in horses and dogs which are raced. But I understand such information is made available, respectively by the Jockey Club in its weekly "Calendar" and annual report, and by

the British Greyhound Racing Board in its fortnightly "Calendar." We have received no request to contribute to the relevant expenditure by the industries.

PRIME MINISTER

Fiji

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Prime Minister on what basis she met the Head of Government of the regime in Fiji; what subjects were discussed at the meeting; what agreements were reached in relation to the resumption of training of Fijian military personnel in the United Kingdom and the selection of participants for such training; what assurances she was given regarding the return to elected conventional Government in Fiji; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I met the Prime Minister of Fiji on 29 March for talks on all aspects of our relations. He told me of his efforts to return Fiji to parliamentary democracy and constitutional rule. These have the full support of Her Majesty's Government. We have offered to increase our technical assistance programme in Fiji. On military training, we shall resume the acceptance of a number of trainee officers from Fiji at staff colleges and other training establishments in the United Kingdom. Candidates will be selected by Fiji and approved by us in the normal way.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Prime Minister on what occasions since 1979 she has met the elected Head of Government of Fiji at 10 Downing street.

The Prime Minister: I met the Prime Minister of Fiji at 10 Downing street on 1 April 1981, 27 April 1983 and 29 March 1988.

Illegal Regimes

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Prime Minister when she last met a Head of Government from an illegal regime.

The Prime Minister: The British Government recognise states, not Governments.

Turkey (Visit)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Prime Minister whom she plans to meet during her visit to Turkey.

The Prime Minister: I visited Turkey between 6 and 8 April. I had talks with President Evren, Prime Minister Ozal and the Leader of the Opposition, Professor Inonu, and met a large number of others active in public life.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister which Ministers from the Foreign Office accompanied her on her recent official visit to Turkey.

The Prime Minister: None.

Chile (Ministerial Statement)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Prime Minister if the statements made to the Chilean press by the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food concerning the conduct of the plebiscite, and expressing support by the United Kingdom, represent the policy of Her Majesty's Government.

The Prime Minister: During his visit to Chile in January my right hon. Friend the Minister of State made it clear, both in public and private discussions, that the British Government remained concerned about human rights violations in Chile and wanted that country to return peacefully to its democratic tradition. He also met the Cardinal Archbishop and other Church leaders active in the field of human rights as well as a widely representative group of opposition leaders. He indicated that it was not for the British Government to comment on the rectitude or otherwise of a plebiscite.

Education Reform

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to improve the co-ordination of the Government's information effort on the subject of schools opting out of local authority control in Scotland; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No. The Government's position is clear. There are no plans to allow Scottish schools to opt out of education authority control in the School Boards (Scotland) Bill which is currently before Parliament. For the future, provision for opting out in Scotland remains a possibility.

Regional Editors (Reception)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what was the cost per editor of the reception for editors of regional daily newspapers at 10 Downing street in the evening of 21 March; and what was its purpose.

The Prime Minister: The cost per person was £7·20. The purpose of the reception was to meet the editors of regional daily newspapers.

British Citizenship Applications

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister if, in the light of complaints about the processing of applications to register for British citizenship, she will dismiss the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton).

The Prime Minister: No.

Engagements

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 12 April.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 12 April.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 12 April.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 12 April.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 12 April.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 12 April.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 12 April.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 12 April.

Mr. Haynes: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 12 April.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. I was also present at Windsor for the arrival of His Majesty The King of Norway. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I will be attending a state banquet in honour of His Majesty the King of Norway.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sittings of the House

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will seek to amend Standing Order No. 10 to extend to all right. hon. and hon. Members the current power of a Minister to move that a sitting be suspended and be resumed at 10 am the next day.

Mr. Wakeham: No.

Select Committee on Procedure

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council what representations he has received seeking an early debate on each of the outstanding reports of the Procedure Committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: A number of hon. Members have made representations to me. Motions relating to two of the outstanding recommendations of the Procedure Committee are now on the Order Paper. Discussions are continuing through the usual channels about the most appropriate way of handling the main body of the Committee's other recommendations.

"Official Report" (Parliamentary Questions)

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Lord President of the Council why the issue of the *Official Report*, number 125 of volume 130, dated 29 March did not contain all the written answers to parliamentary questions; and when he expects each daily issue to be complete up to 10.30 pm with debates and answers to questions.

Mr. Wakeham: The volume of copy for written answers received on 28 and 29 March 1988 was considerably above the norm. It also included some intricate tabular matter which further extended production time scales. The carry over of written answers from the night of 28 March for inclusion in the issue referred to was such that the available capacity for printing written answers received on 29 March was severely reduced. It was, therefore, necessary to publish the remaining written answers in subsequent issues of the *Official Report*.

Hansard Press regularly incorporates in the daily *Official Report* all proceedings of debates up to the cut-off time of 10.30 pm or even later. Written answers are generally produced the same night or within 24 hours, as agreed with the Editor.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Mozambique

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the extent to which the economic policies of Mozambique have responded to the World Bank's report of June 1985 on the Mozambican economy.

Mr. Chris Patten: In the aftermath of the World Bank's report of June 1985 the Mozambican Government held extensive consultations with the bank and the International Monetary Fund on economic policy. They then embarked on a radical programme of liberalisation and economic reform. This covered, inter alia, agricultural prices, controls on the prices of other goods and services, freedom to trade, the exchange rate and monetary and fiscal restraint. There have now been further steps to adjust the exchange rate, increase producer prices, reduce the bureaucracy, improve financial management in government and put enterprises and the banks on a more commercial footing. Foreign investment is welcomed.

The economy of Mozambique has, within the limits imposed by constant guerrilla warfare, dislocation of communications and drought, responded positively to these measures. GNP growth in 1987 is estimated at 3 to 4 per cent., after years of stagnant or falling income.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his assessment of the extent to which Mozambique has benefited from joining the third Lomé convention (1984) and her improved access to European Community markets.

Mr. Chris Patten: Over the five years to 1990 Mozambique will get 145 million ecu (about £100 million) in planned aid from the European development fund, in addition to benefiting from SADCC and other regional projects. Mozambique is also eligible for lending by the European Investment Bank, finance under the STABEX scheme, aid to heavily indebted poor ACP countries and emergency aid. Last year Mozambique received EDF emergency aid worth about £4 million.

Mozambique has not so far benefited significantly from the trade arrangements of the Lomé convention, but under it her industrial products and the great majority of her agricultural products can enter the Community free of tariff or other restrictions.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of the Southern Africa development co-ordination conference as an agency for diminishing Mozambique's economic dependence on the Republic of South Africa.

Mr. Chris Patten: The Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference aims to enhance the economic prospects of its member states, and to give them greater freedom of choice in their economic relationships, by developing sectors of mutual economic benefit. The rehabilitation of transport routes through Mozambique under the auspices of SADCC will contribute to the country's development both through the foreign exchange they generate and indirectly through the establishment of ancillary economic activity. SADCC also aims to diversity the sources of goods and services in the region, to provide common research services in the natural resources sector and to encourage co-operation in attracting investment and tourism from outside the region. Mozambique should benefit from these activities as they develop.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list United Kingdom contributions to Mozambican development through national, Commonwealth and European Community action since 1983.

Mr. Chris Patten: Gross bilateral aid and the estimated British share of European Community aid to Mozambique since 1983 have been as follows:

£'000

	1983	1984	1985	1986
Gross bilateral aid	1,805	4,182	8,366	7,424
Estimated UK share of EC aid	2,280	3,690	4,560	5,090

Figures for 1987 are not yet available

In addition, the United Kingdom's share of expenditure from the Commonwealth special fund for Mozambique set up in 1976 was £17,637 in the year ending 30 June 1983, and £2,619 in the year ending 30 June 1984.

Saharawi Refugees

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will now consider the provision of humanitarian aid to Saharawi refugees through the mediation of British non-governmental organisations.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs gave the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on 14 July 1987, at column 431.

We have no current requests for help from non-governmental organisations, but are maintaining our assistance through existing multilateral channels.

UNICEF

Sir Bernard Braine: To ask the Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office whether he will make a contribution towards the UNICEF programme for child immunisation and water supplies in Lebanon; and what additional support he is able to give to other UNICEF programmes for mother and child care elsewhere.

Mr. Chris Patten: I recently approved a grant of £1·093 million for UNICEF to help mothers and children in extremely difficult circumstances in the Lebanon. The money will be used for immunisation, essential drugs, water supply and education.

I also made grants to UNICEF programmes in the following countries:

Angola — £820,000 for support of water supply and sanitation, control of diarrhoeal diseases, growth monitoring and nutrition.

Zambia — £820,000 to support the general child survival and development programme.

Sudan — £1·640 million to provide support for nutritional surveillance, diarrhoeal diseases control, family health care, nutrition and children in difficult circumstances.

Belize — £60,000 to cover the cost of the country's five year national plan for integrated rural development to develop a model and infrastructure for channelling Government and donor funds and technical support.

Including these grants the total British Government contribution to UNICEF in the financial year 1987-88 was £15·223 million.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Education Reform

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, in relation to the Sheffield education authority area, how many responses he has received in support of the proposals contained in the Education Reform Bill from that area; and how many of these responses express concern or opposition to the proposals.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has received representations from some 30 organisations in the Sheffield area and a substantial number from individual parents and teachers. Many of the responses commented in detail on our proposals and cannot be categorised in the form requested by the hon. Member. Copies of all responses, except those from individuals, are available in the Library of the House.

Student Loans

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from the National Union of Students concerning student loans.

Mr. Jackson: The Student Support Review Group has received written and oral evidence from the National Union of Students, and I have had informal discussions with representatives of the union about the review and the possibility of a loans scheme. Several hon. Members have also drawn my attention to a letter from the president of the NUS about student loans which they received last month.

Universities and Polytechnics

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, in the light of his policy that universities and polytechnics should enjoy parity of esteem, he will take steps to ensure that they enjoy similar staffing levels.

Mr. Jackson: Levels of staffing are matters for individual universities and polytechnics to decide having regard to the teaching and research they aim to provide and to available resources.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will consider allowing polytechnics to be renamed polytechnic universities to underline their parity with universities.

Mr. Jackson: Subject to the passage of the Education Reform Bill, it will fall to my right hon. Friend to re-establish the polytechnics and colleges now maintained by local education authorities under names to be given in a statutory order. He is not persuaded of the merit of the title "polytechnic university".

GCSE

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the estimated cost of introducing the general certificate of secondary education both in aggregate and per capita terms; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Government have made available some £250 million for the introduction of GCSE in England over the three financial years 1986-87 to 1988-89, including £40 million expenditure on GCSE-related in-service training. This is equivalent to some £145 per pupil in each of the first three GCSE cohorts.

Mentally Handicapped Children

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide information on the numbers of mentally handicapped children leaving ESN(S) schools for each year from 1978-79 to 1986-87, and on the expected numbers leaving in each of the five years from 1987-88

Mr. Dunn: The information is not available. Pupils in special schools are not included in the Department's annual sample survey of school leavers. Moreover, since 1983 pupils in England and Wales have not been classified in accordance with categories of handicap. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is responsible for special education in that area.

Stoke (School Reorganisation)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the reasons for the delay in the decision on Stoke-on-Trent school reorganisation in Staffordshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend approved on 5 April Staffordshire's proposals to cease to maintain Burnwood and Chell high schools in Stoke-on-Trent and establish a new secondary school in the Chell premises, and to cease to maintain Chell and Fegg Hayes primary schools and establish a new primary school at Fegg Hayes. I am meeting representatives of the authority on 13 April regarding its proposals to cease to maintain Brookhouse and Willfield high schools and establish a new secondary school at Brookhouse and it is hoped that a decision will be announced very soon. The other proposals to rationalise provision in Stoke-on-Trent attracted no statutory objections and the LEA has therefore determined to implement them.

Student Loans

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what estimates he has made of the cost of the creation and administration of a student loans scheme.

Mr. Jackson: The costs would depend on the nature of the scheme and the arrangements for its administration. We are examining various models.

Schools (Closures and Mergers)

Mr. Wells: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the number of local education authority-supported primary and secondary schools which have submitted proposals for school closures or mergers in each year under the provisions of the Education Act 1980; how many of these schools actually closed or merged; how many of these schools were not closed or merged; what was the average length of time from the submission of the proposal for closure or merger until he either approved, modified, or rejected the proposals; what was the shortest period and what was the longest period; and how many proposals have not yet received a reply.

Mr. Dunn: In the period from 1980 to 1987, 1,192 primary and 418 secondary schools were approved for closure as a result of proposals published by local education authorities under section 12 of the Education Act 1980 which were either approved by my right hon. Friend or his predecessors or determined by the local education authorities. In the same period my right hon. Friend or his predecessors rejected proposals which would have resulted in the closure of a further 57 primary and 93 secondary schools. Details are given in the table. Local education authorities have a statutory duty to implement all such proposals which have been approved or determined.

Information on the average time taken to reach decisions on school closure proposals is not available in the form requested. In 1987 the average time taken to decide all proposals under sections 12 to 15 of the Education Act 1980 which came before my right hon. Friend was 7·1 months. My right hon. Friend is currently considering 84 proposals by local education authorities to cease to maintain schools.

School closures

	Approved			*Rejected*		
Year	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Total*	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Total*
1980	83	27	110	n/a	n/a	n/a
1981	189	36	225	4	6	10
1982	175	72	247	9	17	26
1983	225	70	295	15	24	39
1984	203	56	259	13	7	20
1985	148	61	209	2	12	14
1986	81	53	134	3	17	20
1987	88	43	131	11	10	21
Totals	1,192	418	1,610	57	93	150

n/a—Not available.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, in the light of the proposed abolition of the Inner London education authority, he will obtain and publish the views of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education concerning future optimum arrangements for the educational facilities within that area, in respect of *(a)* provision for statemented pupils in special schools, *(b)* provision for statemented children in non-special schools, *(c)* provision and administration of facilities for pupils with learning difficulties, *(d)* use of boarding establishments of all types which serve the needs of children from more than one London borough, *(e)* the

use, funding and administration of all premises currently engaged in purchasing, preparation and holding of learning materials, books and other equipment, or their maintenance and distribution, and *(f)* a general and special Inspectorate of Schools.

Mr. Dunn: The Department will be issuing draft guidance on the preparation of development plans shortly. This will provide a basis for discussion with the inner London councils of subjects such as those mentioned by the hon. Member. Members of Her Majesty's inspectorate will be closely involved in these discussions.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will seek to obtain and publish the views of *(a)* the Sports Council, *(b)* the Greater London and South Eastern Sports Council, and *(c)* governing bodies or national representative bodies of all sports and recreational facilities presently available within the Inner London education authority area, on the retention of the standards and range of facilities for all such activities for school pupils and others after the proposed abolition of the Inner London education authority.

Mr. Dunn: This is one of the subjects the Department will wish to discuss with the inner London councils over the coming months as the councils draw up their development plans. Any representations by organisations such as those mentioned by the hon. Member would of course be taken into account in those discussions.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, in the light of the proposed abolition of the Inner London education authority, he will seek to obtain and publish the views, in respect of the teaching, appreciation of, and opportunities for, performance of music, together with supply of instruments and specialist advice relating thereto, of *(a)* the boards or presidents of the Royal Academy and Royal College of Music, respectively, *(b)* the Council for Music Education and Training, *(c)* Her Majesty's Service Inspectors of Music in Schools and *(d)* the Master of the Queen's Music, as to the best means of retaining, or improving, the standards achieved and opportunities currently available.

Mr. Jackson: The Department will seek to discuss with the inner London councils and others with an interest in this subject the best arrangements for securing high quality music provision in inner London. Any representations by organisations and individuals such as those mentioned by the hon. Member would of course be taken into account in those discussions.

Education Expenditure

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the per capita spending on primary and secondary education in each local education authority.

Mr. Dunn: The latest information available on actual expenditure is for the financial year 1986-87. The net institutional expenditure per pupil in primary and secondary schools in each local education authority is set out in the table. The figures include the cost of salaries and wages, premises and certain supplies and services. They do not include the cost of school meals, central administration and inspection, debt charges and revenue contributions to capital outlay.

Expenditure per pupil 1986-87

LEA	*Primary schools* £	*Secondary schools* £
Barking	1,010	1,470
Barnet	1,060	1,510
Bexley	915	1,370
Brent	1,105	1,805
Bromley	925	1,420
Croydon	935	1,535
Ealing	1,135	1,650
Enfield	890	1,380
Haringey[1]	n/a	n/a
Harrow	1,020	1,600
Havering	905	1,510
Hillingdon	1,000	1,520
Hounslow[1]	n/a	n/a
Kingston-upon-Thames	915	1,530
Merton	950	1,325
Newham[1]	n/a	n/a
Redbridge	935	1,465
Richmond-upon-Thames	1,000	1,330
Sutton	855	1,300
Waltham Forest	1,095	1,915
ILEA	1,465	2,350
Birmingham	835	1,345
Coventry	910	1,486
Dudley	830	1,350
Sandwell	960	1,410
Solihull	845	1,280
Walsall	970	1,430
Wolverhampton	985	1,395
Knowsley	960	1,515
Liverpool	980	1,445
St. Helens	860	1,340
Sefton	800	1,275
Wirral	815	1,280
Bolton	780	1,230
Bury	795	1,340
Manchester	1,020	1,660
Oldham	870	1,255
Rochdale	850	1,460
Salford	840	1,385
Stockport	805	1,270
Tameside	910	1,325
Trafford	855	1,315
Wigan	860	1,460
Barnsley	925	1,325
Doncaster	980	1,325
Rotherham	890	1,230
Sheffield	1,060	1,490
Bradford	945	1,235
Calderdale	895	1,330
Kirklees	875	1,250
Leeds	905	1,230
Wakefield	955	1,290
Gateshead	980	1,360
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	1,020	1,530
North Tyneside	995	1,455
South Tyneside	965	1,430
Sunderland	85	1,305
Avon	850	1,310
Bedfordshire	875	1,250
Berkshire	845	1,280
Buckinghamshire	845	1,320
Cambridgeshire	815	1,205
Cheshire	810	1,235
Cleveland	895	1,365
Cornwall	795	1,175
Cumbria	915	1,315
Derbyshire	875	1,305
Devon	800	1,225
Dorset	870	1,190
Durham	920	1,225
East Sussex	825	1,235
Essex	820	1,250
Gloucestershire	835	1,260
Hampshire	825	1,220

LEA	Primary schools £	Secondary schools £
Hereford and Worcester	815	1,180
Hertfordshire	870	1,350
Humberside	920	1,270
Isle of Wight	785	1,150
Kent	760	1,145
Lancashire	780	1,255
Leicestershire	885	1,390
Lincolnshire	795	1,185
Norfolk	850	1,230
North Yorkshire	850	1,240
Northamptonshire	815	1,250
Northumberland	840	1,230
Nottinghamshire	935	1,365
Oxfordshire	905	1,350
Shropshire	850	1,285
Somerset	780	1,195
Staffordshire	880	1,255
Suffolk	830	1,165
Surrey	820	1,260
Warwickshire	845	1,220
West Sussex	785	1,220
Wiltshire	850	1,230
England	895	1,340

[1] Expenditure returns have not been submitted by LEAs thus marked.

School Trips

Dr. Glyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, when he receives the report from the Berkshire education committee on the deaths of four boys from Altwood school, Maidenhead, he will make it his policy to draw up guidelines defining the responsibilities at all times of teachers or those in charge of authorised school trips, both at home and abroad.

Mrs. Rumbold: My Department expects shortly to receive a preliminary report on the accident from the Berkshire LEA and this will receive very careful consideration.

Guidance from the Department on safety aspects of school visits is provided in the booklet "Safety in Outdoor Pursuits". A revised version of this is in preparation and any lessons emerging from the tragedy in Austria will be taken into account in this.

The responsibilities for safety matters, both statutory and common law, of local authorities, schools and teachers were re-emphasised in a document the Department circulated last year on first aid.

Higher Education (Contingency Reserves)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether institutions in the new polytechnics and colleges sector will be able to hold contingency reserves and carry over unspent balances from one financial year to the next.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Subject to the passage of the Education Reform Bill, the institutions in the new sector will be able to earn income from a variety of sources, to maintain balances in their accounts and to carry balances forward from year to year, subject to the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council's general oversight of the level of balances.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Shipbuilding

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information is available regarding the level of subsidy or grant aid available from the relevant Government to those; *(a)* European shipbuilders in each EC country, *(b)* far east shipbuilders and *(c)* Brazilian shipbuilders who are perceived to be the main competitors of United Kingdom shipbuilders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: There is no direct support to shipbuilders in Japan or South Korea. I shall write to the hon. Member about Brazil in the light of inquiries now in hand.

All assistance to the shipbuilding industry within the EEC has to conform with the framework established by the Council directive of 26 January 1987 on aid to shipbuilding (87/167/EEC) (the sixth directive) which came into effect on 1 January 1987 and will last to 31 December 1990. This directive ensures that both direct and indirect aids are taken into account and, in addition, establishes a ceiling on aid which is based on the monitored gap between the costs of the most efficient European shipbuilders and the prices quoted by the far east market leaders. The ceiling on aid in 1988 has again been set at 28 per cent. of the cost of building a ship. Member states wishing to establish support schemes for their shipping industries have to submit their proposals for approval to the EC Commission before putting them into effect. The following countries have had their schemes approved:

The United Kingdom

1. *(a)* Small merchant ships
   (i) A maximum of 20 per cent. of cost for ships cosing less that £10 million reducing by three quarters of one percentage point for each £1 million reduction in the cost of build below £10 million;
   (ii) Shipbuilders' relief of 2 per cent. of contract price.
   (b) A maximum of 28 per cent. of cost, including shipbuilders' relief, for vessels costing more than £10 million.
2. Credit terms, for both home and export orders, conforming with the OECD understanding on export credits for ships (ie eight and a half year loans at 7·5 per cent. interest per annum covering 80 per cent. of contract price).
3. Loss of compensation in public sector yards.
4. Regional development grants.

Denmark

1. A home credit scheme allowing for 14-year loans (four-year grace period) at 8 per cent. interest covering 80 per cent. of contract price.
2. Alternatively an aid scheme for ship owners offering, until the end of 1988, for deliveries at latest by end 1990, credit facilities for 80 per cent. of contract price running for 14 years (four-year grace period) at either 2·5 per cent. or 4 per cent. per annum combined with an inflation guarantee linked to the net consumer index beyond 3 per cent. per annum (for 2·5 per cent. bonds) or beyond 1·5 per cent. (for 4 per cent. bonds).
3. State guarantee free of charge to cover second mortgages, typically 30 per cent. of contract price, for small cargo vessels.
4. Specific tax concessions concerning the use of capital from tax relief funds for investment in shipbuilding or conversion for ships.
5. Specific tax concessions provided for accelerated advance depreciation at 50 per cent. for the two-year period 1987 to 1988 by investment of ships against 30 per cent. for investments in other capital goods.

6. Exchange risk guarantee at 0·5 per cent. per annum for credit granted in foreign currencies.

Federal Republic of Germany

1. Grants to shipowners of up to 12·5 per cent. of procurement costs for new building and up to 20 per cent. of cost for conversions.
2. Tax concessions in the form of accelerated depreciation.
3. Home credit and export credit schemes in accordance with the OECD understanding on export credits for ships.
4. Guarantees for new building and conversions for second mortgages on ships under construction.
5. Competition aid in the form of grants of up to 20 per cent. of contract value to meet aided competition from other member states and third countries.

Exporters (Sterling Exchange Rate)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what advice his Department is giving to export industries regarding the level of sterling.

Mr. Atkins: As with other market conditions, the Department can provide factual information but industry must form its own view of future developments. The Department also offers industry a range of practical assistance through the enterprise initiatives to help improve performance in both home and overseas markets.

Data (Accuracy)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) if he will make a statement on the failure of the sponsorship and assistance management information systems as uncovered by the National Audit Office; and what plans his Department has to remedy the loss of data through its inaccuracies on the reports of regional grants;

(2) what was the total amount of pounds sterling in real terms wasted through the inaccuracies and poor quality control of the sponsorship and assistance management information systems, as uncovered by the National Audit Office;

(3) what steps he will take to improve the accuracy of data which have been found to be deficient by the National Audit Office.

Mr. Butcher: The National Audit Office report on "Arrangements for Regional Industrial Incentives" (report no. 346) says (para 4.6) that the sponsorship and assistance management information systems was less useful for monitoring or evaluation than it might be because:

(a) the expected timing of jobs to be created in projects approval for regional development grants was not stated; and

(b) there were minor inaccuracies in 34 out of 80 cases examined, while total payments as recorded on SAMIS could not be reconciled with the Department's financial management information system: hence data were not wholly reliable.

Concerning *(a)* the Department does not consider that the absence of information on the forecast timing of jobs to be created is a serious deficiency. Grant is only paid once jobs have actually been created, and data on actual job creation are available from payments records; moreover most projects are completed within two years.

Concerning *(b)* the Department has accepted the need to improve the accuracy of data held on SAMIS. Officials have been instructed to update the entries for which they are responsible and to enter data promptly in future. A systematic programme of "data cleaning" to remove inaccuracies was instituted last year. Between September 1987 and February 1988 the identified error rate was halved. There has also been a substantial reduction in discrepancies between SAMIS and FINMIS data on payments of regional selective assistance. The position on RDG payments is less good but this is the result of the increase in case load resulting from the Government's decision to terminate the scheme following a period of notice. The Department will continue its efforts to improve data quality. The NAO's reference to "minor inaccuracies" should however be seen in the context that each case may contain several hundred data items.

There is no reason to think that any money has been lost as a result of the deficiencies in SAMIS noted by the NAO: the NAO report itself does not suggest that losses could have resulted from these weaknesses.

Columbus Space Platform Programme

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received asking him to reconsider his decision not to contribute to the European Space Agency's Columbus space platform programme.

Mr. Atkins: Since 10 February, when my right hon. and learned Friend announced that the United Kingdom would not be joining the Columbus programme in the form then proposed, we have received representations on the subject from hon. and right hon. Members, interested parties and members of the public. In the meantime the European Space Agency has been re-assessing with NASA the polar platform requirement, and significant modifications to the target configuration are likely to result. Against the background of these developments, we are reconsidering our position in consultation with ESA, United Kingdom industry and users.

Motor Cycles and Bicycles

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what was the total output of motor cycles, the percentage exported and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany, *(c)* Italy, and *(d)* Japan and *(e)* France in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987;

(2) what was the total output of bicycles, the percentage exported and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany, *(c)* Italy, *(d)* Japan and *(e)* France, in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mr. Atkins: For the United Kingdom and for years from 1975 onwards I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 29 February 1988 in the *Official Report* columns *412-13*. The information available for earlier years is shown in the table. Information on West Germany, Italy, Japan and France could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

£ million

	1965	*1970*
Motor Cycles		
Sales by United Kingdom manufacturers	1·7	1·6
Exports	8·3	15·6
Imports	4·4	4·4
Bicycles		
Sales by United Kingdom manufacturers	12·6	17·4

	1965	1970
Exports	8·9	10·6
Imports		0·4

Airbus

Mr. Warren: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will investigate whether the French and German Governments are giving financial assistance to equipment subcontractors bidding for work on the A330 and A340 Airbus projects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: I understand that financial support may be made available to French and German equipment companies by the Governments in those countries. It is too early to be more specific since the equipments for the A330 and A340 have not yet been selected.

Launch Aid

Mr. Warren: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list grants made under the relevant legislation to United Kingdom equipment suppliers seeking launch aid; what applications are outstanding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: No launch aid has been provided to equipment suppliers under section 1 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982. An approach from the Dowty Group has been made, seeking launch aid to assist its bid for work on the A330/340 Airbus programme. It has been the Department's policy to provide launch aid only to airframe and aeroengine manufacturers, and while Dowty is free to submit a formal application, the Department has not been persuaded, by the arguments that have been made, to depart from this policy.

Air Combat Manouevring System Platforms

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what consultations there have been between his Department and British Aerospace as regards the construction of air combat manouevring system platforms in the North sea; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: There have been no such consultations.

EC Single Market

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether in the light of the Cecchini report published by the European Commission on 31 March, relating to the gains for the European Community as a whole from achieving the single market in 1992, he will take steps to assess the relative economic gains for the United Kingdom within this total, and to publish his conclusions.

Mr. Alan Clark: Community member states have committed themselves to completing the single market by 1992 and it will provide major opportunities for the Community as a whole. The initial results of the recent study by the European Commission appear to confirm the potential benefits. We shall, of course, analyse carefully the findings of the full report when it is published, but we have no plans to commission any formal studies. The extent of the relative economic gains for the United Kingdom will depend crucially on how business responds to the opportunities that will arise.

Footwear

Mr. Fry: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will give the number of pairs and the value of imports of footwear from Taiwan for the last 12 quarters for which figures are available.

Mr. Atkins: The information is given in the following table:

United Kingdom imports of footwear from Taiwan 1985-87
Pairs in million
Value £ million

	1985	1986	1987
1st quarter			
Number of pairs	8·5	7·1	7·8
Value	£22·0	£13·3	£22·8
2nd quarter			
Number of pairs	4·2	4·1	7·4
Value	£15·7	£13·3	£23·9
3rd quarter			
Number of pairs	3·7	4·6	6·6
Value	£11·3	£13·4	£24·7
4th quarter			
Number of pairs	2·4	4·0	4·9
Value	£6·8	£13·9	£16·4

Source: Overseas Trade Statistics.
Notes:
i. Footwear defined as SITC R2 Division 85.
ii. Imports valued cif; Country of origin (COO basis).
iii. All figures provisional.

Mr. Fry: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has recently received on footwear imports from Taiwan; and if he intends to take any action in response to such imports.

Mr. Alan Clark: I have received representatives of the industry recently to discuss their concern about footwear imports from Taiwan. The industry is currently drawing together the facts in order that we can consider what action, if any, would be appropriate.

Yorkshire and Humberside

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has received any response from the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Association to the recent White Paper from his Department; what action he intends to take to assist the Yorkshire and Humberside region; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: A copy of a paper by the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Association, "Implications of the current Department of Trade and Industry White Paper for Yorkshire and Humberside", was sent to me last week.

Firms in the Yorkshire and Humberside region can benefit from assistance offered under the enterprise initiative, which includes support for consultancy in the areas of design, marketing, quality, manufacturing technology, business planning and business information systems (available at a higher rate in assisted areas and urban programme areas), together with support for exports, research and technology and business education.

In the assisted areas of the region regional selective assistance is also available to support projects which would not otherwise go ahead. In development areas small firms (with fewer than 25 employees) are eligible for regional enterprise grants for investment and innovation.

Credit Cards (Report)

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to publish its report on the operations of Access and Barclaycard; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: The Monopolies and Mergers Commission is due to submit its report on the supply of credit card services in the United Kingdom to my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State by 26 May 1989.

Consumer Credit Register

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will introduce legislation to establish a national consumer credit register; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: I welcome current moves by some lending organisations to increase the effectiveness of the role played by the existing credit reference agencies by providing them with full and comprehensive information. The availability of such information should help to ensure responsible lending and minimise consumer over-indebtedness. I have no plans to introduce legislation to establish a national consumer credit register.

Telecommunications (Competition)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he is considering to introduce further competition into United Kingdom based telecommunications following the expiry of the British Telecom/Mercury duopoly in November 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: The Government remain committed to the duopoly policy in telecommunications which was announced in November 1983. The duopoly is not due to be reviewed until at least November 1990 and it would not be appropriate to prejudge the outcome at this stage.

North Peckham Task Force

Ms. Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) when the north Peckham task force was first approached for assistance in respect of a co-operative shop on the Gloucester grove estate;

(2) what ministerial involvement there was in the consideration of the application to the north Peckham task force for funds for a co-operative shop on the Gloucester grove estate.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have been closedly involved in the progress of the proposal to establish a co-operative shop on the Gloucester grove estate since the north Peckham task force was first approached formally by the Gloucester grove co-operative in August 1986 for a £500 grant to carry out market research to determine the feasibility of establishing such a shop. I approved this grant on 1 September 1986. Following the completion of the feasibility study and the decision to locate the shop in part of derelict garages at Winchcombe court, I approved a further grant of £86,000 on 23 March 1987 to pay for conversion costs, together with a grant of £1,200 to pay for drawing up a business plan and temporary office costs. The grant of £86,000 for conversion was subject to Southwark council agreeing to fund revenue costs initially. Despite many attempts by the task force to obtain the council's agreement it was not until February this year that the council agreed to make a grant of £20,000 to the co-operative for revenue costs.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the annual pay of the north Peckham task force leader Daniel Levy.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The leader of the north Peckham task force is a fee-paid consultant. It is not the practice to disclose the value of individual contracts between my Department and its consultants and advisers in order to preserve commercial confidentiality.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the total annual cost of the north Peckham task force, including travel, office, furniture, publicity and staff and including an estimate of the cost of administrative work carried out at his Department in respect of the task force, and the amount paid to outside organisations to monitor its work.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The administrative cost of the north Peckham task force during 1987-88 was around £125,000. It is not possible to estimate the cost of work carried out exclusively on behalf of the north Peckham task force by the headquarters unit, which is responsible among other matters for the operation of the Government's task forces. It is not the practice to disclose the value of individual contracts between the Department and outside consultants and advisers in order to protect commercial confidentiality.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the cost to the north Peckham task force of *(a)* the local link leaflet, and how many were produced and distributed, *(b)* the buffet lunch on the open day on 1 February and *(c)* any other costs of the open day on 1 February.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information requested is as follows:

	£
(a) Design, printing and distribution of 10,000 local link leaflets	2,678
(b) Buffet available throughout open day on 1 February 1988	1,906
(c) (i) Invitations for open day	62
(ii) Fees for plans and display in connection with the Spike community association's presentation of proposals for developing managed workspace in north Peckham	200

Departmental Television Advertisement Campaign

Ms. Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the cost of his Department's current television advertisement campaign.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The cost of the Department's enterprise initiative television advertising campaign, which ended on 27 March 1988, was £5·6 million.

Poppy Products and Derivatives

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster from which countries Britain purchased poppy products or poppy derivatives, by amount, for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Alan Clark: These products are not separately identified in the overseas trade statistics.

EC Mergers Directive

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects the Council of Ministers in the European Community to discuss and reach decisions on the proposed European Economic Community mergers directive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: A progress report on the draft EC regulation on the control of concentrations "merger control" regulation may be made for a meeting of the Council of Ministers in June this year. At the meeting of the Internal Market Council on 30 November 1987, when this proposal was last discussed at Council level, I reserved the United Kingdom's position on the principle of such a regulation, but said that Her Majesty's Government would continue to participate constructively in discussions. A number of working level discussions have since taken place, but the timing of any decision remains uncertain.

Sub-Post Office, Southchurch Road, Southend-on-Sea

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if, in the light of the hardship caused to customers by the temporary closure of the sub-post office at the Strand, Southchurch road, Southend-on-Sea, he will take steps to ensure that the Post Office be obliged to limit the period of time for which sub-post offices may be closed temporarily.

Mr. Butcher: This is an operational responsibility of the Post Office Board. I have drawn my hon. Friend's observations to the attention of the chairman of the Post Office.

Manufactures

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the latest estimate of the United Kingdom surplus or deficit in trade in manufactures with the European Economic Community, the United States of America, the European Free Trade Association, Japan and the rest of the world, respectively, during the last recent 12 months for which figures are available.

Mr. Alan Clark: Because of the introduction in January 1988 of the new Standard International Trade Classification (SITC Rev 3) figures for trade in manufactures by country are not at present available on a consistent basis between 1987 and 1988.

United Kingdom Crude Balance of Trade in Manufactures

	Overseas Trade Statistics basis[3] £ billion	
	1987[1]	*1988[2] Jan to Feb*
European Community	−11·1	−2·5
USA	+0·9	—
EFTA	−3·1	−0·7
Japan	−4·2	−0·7
Rest of World	+7·5	+1·0

[1] Standard International Trade Classification Revision 2.
[2] Standard International Trade Classification Revision 3.
[3] The figures on the OTS basis include insurance and freight charges for imports, but not for exports, so surpluses are understated and deficits are overstated by comparison with Balance of Payments data, which are not available by partner country.
Source: United Kingdom Overseas Trade Statistics.

Industry (Nottingham, North)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will put forward proposals to regenerate industry in the Nottingham, North constituency.

Mr. Atkins: Firms in the Nottingham, North constituency, as in the rest of the country, can benefit from assistance offered under the enterprise initiative, which includes support for consultancy in the areas of design, marketing, quality, manufacturing technology, business planning and business information systems (available at a higher rate as Nottingham, North lies in an urban programme area), together with support for exports, research and technology and business education. The new Nottingham, Leicester and Derby city action team will also contribute to economic development in the constituency.

Libya

Mr. Ron Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total value of goods and services exported to Libya during 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: For the 12 months January to December 1987 the United Kingdom exported goods to the value of £220·6 million. Information on the value of services is not available.

Turkey (Clothing Products)

Sir John Farr: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if, in view of the imbalance which exists in the association treaty between the European Economic Community and Turkey, he will ensure that in the renegotiation of the garment categories contained in the current VRAs, due to be held in the current year, any permitted growth in Turkish access reflects this imbalance.

Mr. Alan Clark: I am aware of the concern being expressed by the United Kingdom clothing and knitwear industry at the prospects for the terms of the renewal of voluntary restraint arrangements with Turkish exporters on clothing products. These concerns will be taken fully into account by my Department when the European Community's position is being prepared in Brussels and officials will be consulting the industries concerned as the negotiations draw nearer.

Origin Marking

Sir John Farr: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what steps he is taking to ensure in the successor regime to the Trade Descriptions Act 1972 that goods sold under a British brand name or one which purports to be will still be required to bear a clear indication of the country of origin, if those goods are not made in Britain;

(2) if he will give a progress report on the successor regime to the Trade Descriptions Act 1972 relating to origin labelling.

Mr. Butcher: My Department has consulted widely on a draft order under section 8 of the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 to provide for a successor regime to the Trade Descriptions Act 1972. The responses to the consultations exercise are currently being analysed.

The proposed order is intended to supplement the existing prohibition (under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968) of misleading indications of the place of manufacture of goods. It would require an indication of the place of production to be given where goods are presented in a way which would otherwise be likely to mislead prospective purchasers about where the goods were produced. Although as the proposed order currently stands the fact that a particular language or trade mark was used in the presentation of goods would not in itself require such origin marking, it would be required if the trade mark or use of language appeared to suggest that the goods were made in a particular place but they were not in fact made there.

Correspondence

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects now to reply to the correspondence sent to him by the hon. Member for Gower regarding Kingrosia park, Clydach.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I explained to the hon. Member in my reply—*Official Report* 18 December column 754—why, most regrettably, his letter had not been answered, and I invited him to write again. I repeat this invitation. If the hon. Member cares to write to me, I shall take steps to ensure that he receives a speedy reply from the responsible Department.

New Enterprise Consultancy Package

Mr. Haynes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will reconsider the eligibility criteria of 500 employees contained in the new enterprise consultancy package, particularly in those industries such as the knitting industry which are comparatively labour-intensive and thus disadvantaged in comparison with firms in capital-intensive sectors.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. I am satisfied that the eligibility criteria we have adopted will ensure that the new enterprise initiative consultancy services will encourage greater use of outside expert advice by those firms which are most likely to benefit from such advice but which are less likely to use such advice without assistance from the Government. Larger firms are more likely to pay for their own outside advice as a matter of normal commercial policy.

Textile and Clothing Exports

Mr. Haynes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the barriers facing United Kingdom textiles and clothing exports to Turkey; and what is the extent of (*a*) Turkish, (*b*) British and (*c*) other European Community countries' Government aids and subsidies for their domestic textile, knitting and clothing industries.

Mr. Alan Clark: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Leyland Bus Division

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what arrangements were made for the payment of the purchase price of the Leyland Bus Division from Austin Rover; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: This is a matter for the Rover Group plc, which was the vendor of the Leyland Bus business.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if Austin Rover has received the full amount of the purchase price of the sale of the Leyland Bus Division in January 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: While this is strictly a matter for the Rover Group plc, I understand from the company that the due sum was paid.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on what dates payments of the purchase price of Leyland Bus Division were made to Austin Rover.

Mr. Atkins: The dates of payments to the Rover Group plc are a matter for the company.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if his Department was involved in negotiating the recent sale of the Leyland Bus Division to Volvo; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: My Department was not involved in negotiating the sale of Leyland Bus Ltd. to Volvo.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if his Department has any plans to recover its investment in Leyland Buses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: No.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the total level of state aid to Leyland Buses in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: In none of the past five years has the European Commission approved or rejected any specific proposals to state-aid the continuing Leyland Bus operations. Following the sale of Leyland Bus by the Rover Group plc the Government subscribed for £680 million of new capital in the Rover Group plc. This was to fund the write-off of the accumulated debts of Leyland Bus and Leyland Trucks left in the Rover Group plc, together with the restructuring costs arising from their sale.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Resistencia Nacional Mocambica

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if since 1983 he has had any meetings with, or made approaches to, or received approaches from representatives of the Resistencia Nacional Mocambica movement or intermediary spokesmen of that movement.

Mrs. Chalker: No direct meetings have taken place. A number of telephone contacts have occurred for humanitarian purposes over the capture of British citizens.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is her Majesty's Government's policy towards the Resistencia Nacional Mocambica.

Mrs. Chalker: We do not recognise RENAMO. We deplore RENAMO's terrorist activities in Mozambique and neighbouring countries, with whose Governments we have full diplomatic relations.

Mozambique

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what status he accords the Nkomati agreement of 1984 in his dealings with Mozambique and the Republic of South Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend has stressed on many occasions the importance of the two parties concerned abiding by the letter and spirit of the Nkomati accord.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his assessment of the extent to which the economy of Mozambique is dependent on the economy of the Republic of South Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: A degree of interdependence exists between the economies of Mozambique and South Africa.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Kingdom relations with Mozambique.

Mrs. Chalker: Our relations with the Government of Mozambique are close. We support President Chissano's efforts to restore peace and stability in Mozambique and more widely in the region. We also welcome and support his economic reform programme, agreed with the IMF.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the extent to which Commonwealth countries have implemented the Vancouver summit commitment to embark upon a process of consultations with a view to enabling those of its members in a position to do so to make appropriate contributions to the security needs of Mozambique.

Mrs. Chalker: General Obansanjo recently visited certain front-line states, including Mozambique, on a mandate from the Vancouver Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting to consider what support might be needed to assist with Mozambican security needs.

Hong Kong

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Hong Kong citizens have emigrated in each of the last eight quarters for which figures are available.

Mr. Eggar: The Hong Kong Government do not keep statistics on emigration from Hong Kong.

Fiji

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the status of the representative of the Government of Fiji resident in London.

Mr. Eggar: The representative of Fiji resident in London is at present charge d'affaires ad interim, pending the arrival of an ambassador, who is expected shortly.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the terms of Lord Salisbury's Dispatch, the treaty between the Governments of Fiji, India and the United Kingdom, are still in force; and what is his assessment of its validity in the current circumstances in Fiji.

Mr. Eggar: The dispatch from the Secretary of State for India to the Viceroy of India dated 24 March 1875 indicated principles by which British colonial Governments should be guided in their dealings with emigrants from India. The proposals in this dispatch were never formally accepted, however, although they were occasionally upheld by some colonial administrations in the British empire. The dispatch's only relevance to present circumstances in the modern Republic of Fiji is as an example of attempts to manage race relations in the past.

Nuclear Weapons

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to initiate with other nuclear non-proliferation treaty member states an investigation into alleged collaboration between Israel and South Africa on nuclear weapons research and testing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We have no evidence of such collaboration. It is our long-standing policy to follow as closely as possible all developments which might lead to the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has received any reports from the British Antarctic Survey concerning nuclear weapons tests in the Norwegian section of Antarctica.

Mr. Eggar: We have received no such reports from the British Antarctic Survey.

European Parliament

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration has been given by the Council of Ministers of the European Economic Community to attendance by Ministers or officials of the Governments of member states at any meeting of the European Parliament or its committees; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The Council has discussed the question of requests from the European Parliament for evidence from the Governments of member states, and has agreed that it is for each member state to decide how to reply. There is no legal obligation on member states to give evidence to the European Parliament or its committees.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what requests have been received by Her Majesty's Government from any organ of the European Parliament requesting or requiring evidence in writing or attendance of any Government Minister or civil servant; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We are aware of no such requests.

Treaty of Rome

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to publish as a Command Paper in the treaty series an amended version of the treaty of Rome incorporating the provisions of the Single European Act.

Mrs. Chalker: Her Majesty's Stationery Office is working on a Command Paper containing the treaties establishing the EEC, the EAEC and the ECSC as revised by the Single European Act. This is a major undertaking. It seems likely that it will be ready for publishing in early September.

Western European Union (Co-location)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to discuss the co-location of the Western European Union with other member states; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The subject of co-location is on the agenda of the Western European Union ministerial meeting in The Hague on 18-19 April.

NATO Headquarters (Arrested Britons)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions were taken by Her Majesty's Ambassador to Belgium in respect of British citizens arrested outside NATO headquarters on 2 March.

Mr. Eggar: I have nothing to add to the replies which I gave to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) on 16 March, at column *576*, and to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 30 March, at column *518*.

Bangladesh

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings Her Majesty's high commissioner in Bangladesh has had with *(a)* trade unions, *(b)* political parties and *(c)* human rights groups in Bangladesh.

Mr. Eggar: The British high commissioner in Dhaka and his staff regularly meet representatives of trade unions, political parties and human rights groups in Bangladesh.

Turkey

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings Her Majesty's ambassador to Turkey has had with *(a)* trade unions, *(b)* political parties, *(c)* human rights groups, *(d)* Kurdish groups and *(e)* Armenian groups in the last year.

Mrs. Chalker: Her Majesty's ambassador and his staff have regular contact with people of all backgrounds, views and political persuasions in Turkey.

Munich Opera

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made by him to the Commission of the European Economic Community and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany about the compatability with the treaty of Rome and other international legal obligations of the refusal under German law of the orchestra of the Munich Opera to play Scott Joplin scores for a performance arranged by an English choreographer, on the alleged grounds of the composer's ethnic origins; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: None. Initial reports were inaccurate. There is no reason for us to intervene.

"Cry Freedom"

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will arrange for the showing of the film "Cry Freedom" at the British embassy in South Africa; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: There are no plans to do so.

Drugs

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what collaboration there has been within the Commonwealth in tackling national and international drug misuse and trafficking problems.

Mr. Eggar: Successive Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings have stressed the importance of co-operation in this field. Regular and effective co-operation takes place through established channels within the United Nations, Interpol and the Customs Co-operation Council; and through close bilateral links between individual countries. A scheme relating to mutual assistance in criminal matters within the Commonwealth was launched in 1986 which will provide a framework for co-operation for countering drug and other serious international crime trafficking. The Commonwealth Secretariat is assisting Commonwealth countries through the provision of training in a number of drug-related areas.

Plutonium

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if any plutonium from unsafeguarded electricity board magnox reactors has been exported to the United States of America since May 1979 under bilateral or international Atomic Energy Agency safeguards.

Mr. Mellor: There are no unsafeguarded Electricity Board Magnox reactors.

World Food Conference

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government were represented at the recent world food conference in Brussels organised by the President of the Parliament of the European Economic Community; if he will place any documents circulated prior to, during, or subsequent to the conference in the Library; and what representations were made by Government Departments.

Mrs. Chalker: The world food conference, which was organised by Lord Plumb as a personal initiative, was attended by a senior Foreign Office official who delivered

a speech on my behalf and a message from my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

Morocco

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government intend to make to the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco, in view of that Government's refusal to implement United Nations resolution 42/78.

Mr. Mellor: None. Such representations would not be consistent with our own abstention on United Nations General Assembly resolution 42/78.

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government will launch an initiative to bring about a negotiated settlement of the conflict in the western Sahara between the Polisario and the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco.

Mr. Mellor: No. We believe that the dispute is one for the people of the region to resolve. We support the mediation efforts of the United Nations Secretary General and have welcomed his initiative in sending a technical mission to the region.

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why, in the light of Her Majesty's Government's neutrality in the western Sahara, permission for the supply of military equipment for the armed forces of the Kingdom of Morocco continues to be given.

Mr. Mellor: Our policy of strict impartiality over the western Sahara dispute does not preclude the sale of conventional military equipment to friendly Governments in the region.

UN African Peace Plan

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why Her Majesty's Government abstained from the vote on the United Nations Organisation for African Unity peace plan at the United Nations General Assembly in October 1987.

Mr. Mellor: We abstained on United Nations General Assembly resolution 42/78 on 4 December 1987 in accordance with our policy of strict impartiality over the western Sahara dispute.

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the implications of Her Majesty's Government's acquiescence to the European Economic Community-Kingdom of Morocco fishing agreement of 1987 for Her Majesty's Government's policy towards Morocco's claim to the waters in dispute between the Polisario and the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco.

Mrs. Chalker: The European Community/Morocco fisheries agreement has no implications for our existing policy towards Morocco's claim to the disputed waters.

WEU (Collaborative Equipment Projects)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what collaborative equipment projects have been initiated within the countries of the Western European Union since 1983; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have been asked to reply.

The active part that WEU nations play in both intra-European and transatlantic collaborative defence equipment projects can be seen from table 8 in Volume 1 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates, 1987". In addition to those listed as

"In development of earlier study phases"

the M483A1 and MLRS phase 1 were initiated after 1983. A further three projects have been launched since the statement was published:

Modular Stand-Off Weapons (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, UK, US)
NATO Anti-Air Warfare System (Canada, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, UK, US)
Family of Air Missiles (France, Italy, Spain, UK)

Israel (Non-proliferation Treaty)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, *Official Report*, 25 March, columns *241-42*, when he last made a specific representation to the Israeli Government to sign the non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Mellor *[pursuant to his reply, 31 March 1988, c. 628]:* My answer should have said:

My right hon. and learned Friend has not had a recent opportunity to raise the non-proliferation treaty with the Israeli Government. But, at his request, the permanent under-secretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office did so on 22 October 1987 with the political director of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

DEFENCE

Tucano

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when trials on the Tucano training aircraft commenced at the aircraft and armaments experiemental establishment, Boscombe Down.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) on 11 January at column *65*.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many hours have been flown by the Tucano training aircraft during its trials at the aircraft and armaments experimental establishment, Boscombe Down.

Mr. Sainsbury: Some 36 hours.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he now expects the Tucano training aircraft to enter service with the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Sainsbury: The first Tucano aircraft is expected to enter service shortly.

Air Combat System

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations there have been between his Department and British Aerospace as regards the construction of air combat manouevring system platforms in the North sea; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have nothing to add to my reply of 31 March, at column *622*.

US Air Force Headquarters

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to transfer the United States Air Force headquarters from Mildenhall to Greenham common.

Mr. Ian Stewart: There are no current plans to move the headquarters of the United States Third Air Force from RAF Mildenhall.

Military Mission (Bangladesh)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British officers are currently stationed in Bangladesh as part of a military mission.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The British military advisory team in Bangladesh consists of three officers seconded as instructors at the Bangladesh defence services command and staff college.

Nimrod Project

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the number of jobs lost or forgone as a result of the cancellation of the Nimrod project.

Mr. Sainsbury: It is a matter for the companies concerned to advise on the effect on jobs resulting from the cancellation of the Nimrod project. I would also refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 29 March at column *365*.

Ammunition Transport (Caerwent)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has to improve security arrangements for the transport of ammunition from the Caerwent, Gwent, Royal Air Force base, following the conviction of a civilian driver for drunken driving at Chepstow magistrates' court on 29 March.

Mr. Ian Stewart: RAF Caerwent is made available to the United States army which is responsible for the safety and security of the ammunition stored at the base and associated transport arrangements. The United States authorities are subject to the same regulations governing the storage and handling of ammunition as Her Majesty's forces.

I am informed that the United States army at RAF Caerwent has contracted out the transport of ammunition to a commercial haulage firm. In the incident referred to the driver in question was detained by the Gwent constabulary before entering the secure ammunition storage area. Had he entered this area whilst under the influence of alcohol he would not have been permitted to load ammunition or remain in the secure area in accordance with standard United States army procedures.

House Sales

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy that married quarters declared surplus to requirements and offered for sale to civilian employees should attract the same rate of discount as his Department's civilian housing offered for sale in similar circumstances.

Mr. Sainsbury: No. When married quarters which are capable of individual sale are declared surplus to requirements they are normally offered for sale to service personnel at 30 per cent. discount under the services' discount scheme. However, if any of these quarters are occupied by civilian tenants these occupants may be permitted, as an exceptional measure, to purchase the properties, but it would be unfair to allow them a larger discount than that available to service personnel for similar properties.

Low Flying

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy on 20 January, *Official Report*, column *764*, if the figure for the number of complaints received about low flying includes complaints from the vicinity of airfields about aircraft landing and taking off;

(2) pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *765*, if low flying sorties by United States Navy, Army and Marine Corps aircraft are included in the United States Air Force category.

Mr. Freeman: No.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy of 20 January. *Official Report*, column *765*, if the figure for low flying sorties over the United Kingdom in 1987 includes flights by Ministry of Defence (Procurement Executive) aircraft and company trials aircraft.

Mr. Freeman: Yes.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which counties are covered by low flying area 3.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* The only county covered by low flying area 3 is Cornwall.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which counties are covered by low flying area 2.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* Low flying area 2 covers Avon, Devon, Somerset, most of Dorset and parts of Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which counties are covered by low flying area 1.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* Low flying area 1 covers parts of Berkshire, Dorset, Hampshire and Wiltshire.

Fighter Evasion Exercises

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what minimum separation distance was authorised for fixed wing aircraft participating in the fighter evasion exercise held in the vicinity of Llanwrtyd Wells, Powys, from 18 to 22 January;

(2) what minimum separation distance was authorised for fixed wing aircraft participating in the fighter evasion exercise held in the vicinity of Llanwrtyd Wells, Powys, from 2 to 5 November 1987;

(3) what minimum separation distance was authorised for fixed wing aircraft participating in Exercise Border Baron and Regal Burst, held in Yorkshire in July 1986;

(4) what minimum separation distance was authorised for fixed wing aircraft participating in the fighter evasion exercise held in the vicinity of Holsworthy, Devon, on 14 October 1987.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 22 February 1988]*: The authorised minimum separation distance for fixed wing aircraft participating in all the exercises referred to was 250 ft.

EMPLOYMENT

Wages Inspectorate

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list for 1986 and 1987 in relation to (i) all wages councils, (ii) the Clothing Manufacturing wages council, (iii) the Hat, Cap and Millinery wages council, (iv) the Made-Up Textiles wages council and (v) the Retail Bespoke wages council *(a)* the number of homewokers in respect of whom the wages inspectorate examined employers' records and who were shown as being aged under 21 years, *(b)* the number of homeworkers shown as being aged under 21 years who were visited, *(c)* the number of homeworkers who were found to be aged 21 years or over as a result of a visit, *(d)* the amount of arrears assessed as due to homeworkers found to be aged 21 years or over as a result of a visit and *(e)* the amount of arrears collected for them.

Mr. Nicholls: Statistics relating to the ages of homeworkers are not compiled by the wages inspectorate.

Adjudication Officers

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide details of the sample survey of delays in adjudication officers making decisions on availability for work, by regions, for each quarter from 31 December 1986.

Mr. Lee: Information is not available in the precise form requested. However, the speed with which adjudication officers make decisions (that is, the time between their receiving a referral and reaching a decision after making all necessary inquiries), is monitored in a 5 per cent. sample of cases. This sampling was instigated only from 1 April 1987 (from 1 July in Scotland), and therefore I am only able to provide details for three-month periods ending 30 June 1987 and 30 September 1987. For information on the three-month perod ending 31 December 1987, I refer the hon. Member to my reply in the *Official Report* on Friday 25 March at column *259*. The samples show that, for the three-month periods ending 30 June 1987 and 30 September 1987, the percentage of all availability questions (on both new and existing claims and including decisions on availability during holidays) decided within four weeks of referral to an adjudication officer, for each employment service region, was as follows:-

	Availability		*Restricted availability*	
	30 June 1987	*30 September 1987*	*30 June 1987*	*30 September 1987*
	Per cent.	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*
Northern	96·4	96·4	88·9	88·9
Eastern	84·8	84·4	92·7	85·4
Southern	86·2	91·9	90·8	94·4
Wales	94·9	93·9	92·3	96·3
Midlands	86·7	79·0	80·0	78·2
North West	94·1	100	94·9	100
Yorkshire and Humberside	97·4	96·9	94·5	99·0
South West	95·5	88·8	94·9	95·1
Scotland	No return	89·9	No return	92·3

The creation of the Employment Service on 26 October 1987 involved changes in the regional structure. These figures are not, in all instances, therefore, directly comparable with those given in the response to the previous question.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will publish *(a)* the total number of establishments on the wages inspectorate's register, *(b)* the number of establishments on the wages inspectorate's register classified to the Clothing Manufacturing wages council, *(c)* the number of establishments on the wages inspectorate's register classified to the Hat, Cap and Millinery wages council, *(d* the number of establishments on the wages inspectorate's register classified to the Linen and Cotton Handkerchief and Household Goods and Linen Piece Goods, wages council, *(e)* the number of establishments on the wages inspectorate's register classified to the Made-up Textiles wages council, and *(f)* the number of establishments on the wages inspectorate's register classified to the Retail Bespoke Tailoring wages council;

(2) if he will publish the best available estimate by his Department of *(a)* the total number of establishments covered by wages councils, *(b)* the number of establishments covered by the Clothing Manufacturing wages council, *(c)* the number of establishments covered by the Hat, Cap and Millinery wages council, *(d)* the number of establishments covered by the Linen and Cotton Handkerchief and Household goods and Linen Piece Goods wages council, *(e)* the number of establishments covered by the Made-up Textiles wages council, and *(f)* the number of establishments covered by the Retail Bespoke Tailoring wages council.

Mr. Nicholls: At December 1987, the figures requested were:

	Number
All wages councils	379,253
Clothing Manufacture	6,964
Hat, Cap and Millinery	123
Linen and Cotton Handkerchief etc.	114
Made-up Textiles	292
Retail Bespoke Tailoring	509

The above figures are updated annually and are regarded as sufficiently reliable for departmental needs. No other such figures or estimates are compiled for the numbers of establishments covered by wages councils.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of occasions on which section 23 of the Wages Act 1986 has been used to bring civil or criminal prosecutions against individuals for offences by bodies corporate.

Mr. Nicholls: None.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the instructions issued to wages inspectors on the use of section 23 of the Wages Act 1986.

Mr. Nicholls: No specific instructions on the use of section 23 of the Act have been issued to inspectors.

EC Single Market

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether, in the light of the findings of the Cecchini report, published by the European Community on 31 March relating to the benefits to the European Community as a whole from achieving a single market, he will assess the employment implications for the United Kingdom of realising this 1992 target.

Mr. Cope: This Department had undertaken a preliminary look at the employment implications of the completion of the single market before the Cecchini report was published. It is considering what work will be necessary to assess these implications further.

Gas Appliance Installers

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to introduce the mandatory registration of installers of gas appliances; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Commission and the Council for the Confederation for the Registration of Gas Installers have been asked to develop proposals for an independent, broadly based, and representative body to promote safety in gas installation. Mandatory registration of gas installers with such a body is among the proposals currently being considered.

Tourism

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a further statement on the development of tourism in the rural areas.

Mr. Lee: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Devon, West and Torridge (Miss Nicholson), *Official Report*, Monday 7 December 1987, at column *30*. The English tourist board's rural tourism strategy referred to in my reply will be published later this year.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a further statement on the development of tourism in the seaside resorts.

Mr. Lee: Seaside resorts play an important role in English tourism. But the quality of the accommodation and attractions they offer needs to be maintained and improved. The English tourist board is helping resorts through its marketing activities, tourism development action programmes, and the section 4 scheme of selective financial assistance.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many overseas tourists visited Suffolk and Norfolk in the last year for which figures are available; and how much he estimates they contributed to the local economy.

Mr. Lee: There were an estimated 120,000 overnight visits to Suffolk and 130,000 overnight visits to Norfolk by overseas visitors in 1986. Their expenditure is estimated to have been £19 million in Suffolk and £23 million in Norfolk.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the number of people employed in tourism and tourism-related industry in Suffolk and Norfolk.

Mr. Lee: The latest estimates of employees in employment in tourism-related industries, which relate to September 1984, are 12,900 for Suffolk and 16,200 for Norfolk. These estimates do not include the self-employed, for whom comparable estimates are not available.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is being done overseas to promote holidays in East Anglia.

Mr. Lee: The British Tourist Authority has, in conjunction with the East Anglia tourist board, developed a range of overseas promotional activities to encourage visitors to East Anglia. These include the publication and distribution of brochures on holidays in East Anglia, and special promotions aimed at overseas travel agents.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is being done in the United Kingdom to promote holidays in East Anglia.

Mr. Lee: The promotion of holidays in East Anglia is undertaken by individual operators and resorts in the area, complemented by the work of the English tourist board and the East Anglia tourist board.

The prime objective of the East Anglia tourist board is to improve the region's share of the holiday market. In the 1987/88 financial year the East Anglia tourist board spent some £643,000 on promoting holidays in East Anglia. This represented an increase of some 23 per cent. on the previous financial year.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the development of the caravan, holiday park and water-based holiday industry in East Anglia.

Mr. Lee: These sectors of the holiday industry play a major role in East Anglian tourism. But continued investment and upgrading of facilities is essential to counter the increased competition from both this country and abroad.

The tourism industry in the area will benefit from the English tourist board's recently launched tourism

development action programme for Norwich, South Norfolk and Broadland. The Center Parcs holiday village near Thetford due to open in spring 1989 will also significantly increase the number of visitors to the area.

The caravan and holiday park industry is benefiting from the efforts of the National Caravan Council and the British Holiday and Home Parks Association to raise standards and improve quality through their codes of practice and grading scheme.

The Broads boating holiday industry will gain from initiatives by the English tourist board and British Tourist Authority to promote water-based holidays in England. The diversification into good quality riverside self-catering accommodation by some of the traditional boatyards should also help bring additional visitors and extend the season.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total number of people aged 18 and 19 years who are unemployed in north Yorkshire.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. On the 14 January 1988, the number of unemployed claimants in the county of north Yorkshire aged 18 and 19 years, were 983, and 1,047 respectively.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if, pursuant to his reply of 1 March, *Official Report* column *542,* he will initiate inquiries into the reasons for the substantial differences in the level of unemployment in the European Free Trade Association and in the European Economic Community, respectively.

Mr. Lee: My Department has no plans to conduct an inquiry as specific as my hon. Friend suggests. However, my Department is continually reviewing the reasons for differing levels of unemployment in other industrial countries, including most of the European Free Trade Association and EC member states.

Job Vacancies (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of notified job vacancies in each jobcentre covering the Nottingham, North constituency for each month since June 1979.

Mr. Lee: Following is the available information. The table shows the numbers of unfilled vacancies notified to each of the jobcentres which together cover an area most closely corresponding to the parliamentary constituency of Nottingham, North for each month from April 1983, the earliest date from which consistent local figures are available.

Unfilled vacancies

	Bulwell Jobcentre	*Nottingham Jobcentre*	*Ilkeston Jobcentre*
1983			
April	128	952	62
May	132	1,055	48
June	113	1,132	64
July	125	1,056	69
August	128	1,153	59
September	159	1,169	68
October	143	1,257	96
November	134	1,072	100
December	143	849	61
1984			
January	159	758	47
February	148	820	50
March	167	672	53
April	143	661	50
May	127	637	46
June	130	687	48
July	121	760	37
August	142	1,036	42
September	157	1,291	80
October	186	1,251	77
November	207	1,026	70
December	159	904	67
1985			
January	176	761	62
February	142	687	49
March	147	667	67
April	166	732	61
May	158	806	70
June	187	1,135	78
July	174	1,059	60
August	214	1,017	72
September	220	1,182	67
October	274	1,321	172
November	243	1,182	188
December	160	953	63
1986			
January	176	919	42
February	198	839	73
March	173	891	57
April	165	767	79
May	170	902	73
June	158	981	88
July	182	1,053	77
August	147	1,205	62
September	143	1,179	62
October	137	1,075	67
November	157	1,024	93
December	145	856	69
1987			
January	142	763	51
February	156	679	118
March	149	726	117
April	151	796	110
May	163	1,033	106
June	181	1,126	135
July	157	921	129
August	185	907	130
September	228	1,046	148
October	207	1,142	126
November	195	1,077	149
December	143	910	91
1988			
January	143	899	67
February	144	896	78

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people had their unemployment benefit stopped because they were considered to be not available for work in the periods *(a)* January, five weeks, and *(b)* February, four weeks; and what percentage these were of the total number of decisions made by the adjudicating officers in the two periods.

Mr. Lee: Information is not readily available about the number of persons who have their entitlement to

unemployment benefit disallowed because they are considered not to be available for work in the periods January and February, and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

However, in the six-month period ending 31 December 1987 the total number of claims for unemployment benefit disallowed by the adjudication officer, on the grounds of not being available for work was 50,588. This totalled 8·3 per cent. of all the claims disallowed by the adjudication officers during the period.

Adult Training Scheme

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether the differential benefits for under and over 25-year-olds were taken into account in planning the resources for the new adult training scheme; whether those who have their 25th birthday during their time on the course will automatically receive an increase in allowance in line with the Social Security Act 1986 differentials; and if he is prepared to reconsider such differentials in order to pay the same allowance to all participants of whatever age.

Mr. Nicholls: Payments to trainees in the new employment training programme will be those unanimously recommended by the Manpower Services Commission. The resources available for the new programme take into account the range of benefits that trainees may be receiving, including differential income support rates for people aged over and under 25. Those trainees who are in receipt of income support before joining employment training will continue to receive an element of income support while they train. Any change in circumstances—including reaching the age of 25—will therefore be reflected in the overall payment received by the individual. It is a basic principle of employment training that all participants should be better off while training than they would be if they remained unemployed and in receipt of benefit, and this will be ensured by the payment system we have adopted.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of jobless claimants referred from each jobcentre to benefit offices in each of the months January, February and March of this year.

Mr. Lee: This information is not available. Jobcentre staff do not keep a record of the numbers of jobless claimants referred to the unemployment benefit offices.

SCOTLAND

Forestry

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he has any proposals to place consultations over new afforestation proposals on a more public footing;

(2) if he has any proposals to widen the membership base of the Forestry Commission's regional advisory committees.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. and learned Friend's reply of 10 December 1987, columns *251-54*, to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro).

Water Supplies

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he anticipates any increase in the demand for laboratory services by district councils, to analyse samples of water taken to comply with European Community directive 80/778/EEC;

(2) how many private water suppliers there are in each district council area;

(3) what research has been done by his Department into the costs to district councils of implementing European Community directive 80/778/EEC; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The distribution of private water supplies among districts is very uneven—the numbers vary from a single supply to more than 2,000—and the demand for laboratory services and the costs of implementing directive 80/778/EEC are likely to vary accordingly.

My Department asked district councils in December 1987 to provide details of the number of private supplies in their areas, classified according to the size of supply. Most authorities have now given this information, but some returns are still awaited, and I cannot yet give total figures for these supplies.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how long he estimates it will take to complete a thorough programme of sampling of the water supplies in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Sampling of public and private water supplies to maintain up-to-date information on their quality is of its nature a continuing process.

Rating Reform

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he has given to the position of people, in the financial year 1989-90, who have their main residence in Scotland and are paying poll tax, but who live for some of the year in rented accommodation in England and so are also paying a rates element within their rental; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: It is right that visitors to England and Wales should in appropriate circumstances continue to contribute towards the cost of local authority services through the system of domestic rates until that system is abolished in April 1990.

Departmental Correspondence (Confidentiality)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is now taking to safeguard the confidentiality of information in his Department, in the light of the unauthorised disclosure of correspondence on opting-out of the educational system between No. 10 Downing street and his office; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: The measures taken in the Scottish Office to protect official information are in accordance with standards laid down for application throughout Government Departments. The circumstances of the unauthorised disclosure of recent correspondence between the Prime Minister's office and my own are being investigated.

School Clothing Grants

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report*, for each education authority in Scotland, the number of applications received for financial assistance for school clothing under the Education Acts, the number of grants awarded and the amount of money expended by the education authority for each of the last five most recent years for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Details regarding the number of applications for clothing grants and the number of grants awarded under section 54 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 are not held centrally. Information on total expenditure is set out in the table:

£ '000

Education authority	*Financial year*				
	1982-83	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
Borders	13	18	30	37	48
Central	248	324	393	375	369
Dumfries and Galloway	26	32	44	..	1
Fife	18	33	116	128	190
Grampian	4	8	11	9	32
Highland	32	63	93	119	116
Lothian	122	180	248	126	168
Strathclyde	1,937	2,917	3,034	3,227	3,294
Tayside	90	139	188	224	229
Orkney	4	4	5	5	7
Shetland	..	..	..	..	..
Western Isles	19	37	18	20	20
Total	2,513	3,755	4,180	4,270	4,474

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the amounts budgeted for expenditure in the next financial year by each local education authority in Scotland to meet the demand for clothing grants under the education grants, shown separately as an amount per eligible pupil at school in each region.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will consider making a specific grant to each education authority in Scotland to cope with increases in applications for financial assistance for clothing grants under the Education Acts.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to direct resources into a specific grant for the purpose of supporting expenditure by local authorities on clothing grants made under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. It is for authorities to determine the level of their spending for this purpose from within the resources available to them.

Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) why he has cut the grant to the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations from £349,000 to £250,000; why only three weeks' notice was given; and why no prior consultation was held with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations;

(2) if he will reconsider the decision to reduce the grant to the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations; what assessment he has made of the implications of the proposed cut in grant for redundancies and for the level of service provided by the voluntary sector; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what action has been taken in the light of the review of the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations carried out by John S. Gibson and presented to the Government in March 1987.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: After considering Mr. Gibson's report, together with a lengthy submission made by SCVO in response to my request for its views, I concluded that there was a strong case for providing additional funds for local councils of social service in rural areas. I also took the view that there was scope for a reduction in support for SCVO as a contribution to the additional funding for local initiatives. Accordingly, grant to local councils will be increased in total by £120,000 in 1988-89 and grant to SCVO will be reduced by £90,000. There is, of course, nothing to prevent local councils from purchasing services from SCVO. Additionally, I have authorised consultations with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on the possibility of further joint action by central and local government in the longer term to promote the development of local voluntary initiatives in both rural and urban areas.

Notwithstanding the reduction in grant, SCVO will receive substantial support from central Government funds in 1988-89 and I am confident that after re-assessing priorities it can continue to make a useful contribution to the promotion of voluntary sector interests. It is for the council to consider ways and means of assimilating the reduction in grant including the effect on staffing levels, but departmental officials are ready to offer advice and assistance. I wished to convey my decisions personally to SCVO and did so at the first opportunity in the course of a meeting with the vice-convenor and other representatives on 11 March.

My right hon. and learned Friend and I see no grounds for reconsidering these decisions.

Speech Therapy (Twechar)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to improve the provision of speech therapy to primary school children in Twechar; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The provision of speech therapy services in any particular area is a matter for the relevant health board to determine in the light of its own assessment of needs and its priorities within the available resources. I understand that the hon. Member recently met the chairman and senior officials of the Greater Glasgow health board to discuss speech therapy services.

Inshore Fishing

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to review the operation of the Inshore Fishing (Prohibition of Fishing and Fishing Methods) (Scotland) Order 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The current inshore fishing regime in Scottish waters has been in force since July 1985. We have indicated previously that we would review the regime once it had been in operation for about three years, and we have therefore today issued a consultation paper proposing a number of changes. A copy of the document has been placed in the Library. The paper is being circulated widely and responses have been requested by 3 June. Thereafter, officials of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland will meet interested parties to discuss any contentious issues. If changes in the current inshore fishing regime are thought to be needed, a new order under the Inshore Fishing (Scotland) Act 1984 will be required.

South of Scotland Electricity Board

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will issue a direction to the South of Scotland Electricity Board to rescind its recent contract with Shell for the supply of 20,000 tonnes of South African coal per month.

Mr. Lang: Contracts for the purchase of coal are a matter for the commercial judgment of the board. As regards the board's recent contracts for the purchase of foreign coal, I understand that no contract for South African supplies has been concluded by the board.

Private Medical Schemes

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the private medical schemes which the Scottish Development Agency has discussed with Scottish Homes and Health Department.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 28 March 1988]:* The Scottish Development Agency ensures that the appropriate health board or social work department registration requirements have been met.

In the case of Health Care International there was a statutory requirement for the company to make application to my right hon. and learned Friend for approval. In that context, discussions took place involving officials of the Scottish Home and Health Department and agency staff.

WALES

Spastics Society

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from the Spastics Society in Wales seeking a meeting to discuss initiatives for people with physical handicaps; when the need for such a meeting was first discussed; and when it is now expected to take place.

Mr. Grist: A meeting was held with the regional manager of the society on 17 March, at which a number of matters were discussed. My understanding is that the society, in conjunction with the Wales Council for the Disabled, is currently preparing a report outlining its proposals for a strategy for those in Wales with physical handicaps. Further discussions can be arranged when this report is ready.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assistance his Department will give to the Spastics Society in Wales towards providing a computer facility to the society's work in Wales; and whether any assistance can be funded out of underspending on his Department's votes for 1987-88.

Mr. Grist: Our Department is still considering the request which has been made by the society although it was not possible to make any assistance available in 1987-88.

Correspondence

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to reply to the correspondence of 23 February from the hon. Member for Caerphilly addressed to the Secretary of State for Social Services concerning cyclo progynova, which has been forwarded to his Department.

Mr. Grist: I wrote on 8 April 1988.

ENERGY

Eastcrop District Heating, Nottingham

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will take steps to encourage the Eastcrop district heating schemes in Nottingham; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My Department encourages the promotion of combined heat and power technology where it is economic, whether in conjunction with district heating schemes or not. It is for the promoters of CHP/DH schemes to ensure successful implementation.

Air Combat System

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consultations there have been between his Department and British Aerospace as regards the construction of air combat manouevring system platforms in the North sea; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: In September 1987 an official from my Department attended a presentation by BAe on its proposal, at which the company was advised of the statutory consents which would be needed before any

platforms could be emplaced and the conditions likely to be imposed to ensure that they would be removed when disused. My Offshore Supplies Office subsequently brought to BAe's attention the considerable capability of the United Kingdom fabrication industry and asked that, if the project went ahead, British fabrication companies be given every opportunity to bid for the contracts.

Plutonium

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish the specific current location and use to which all of the plutonium produced in *(a)* each United Kingdom electricity board advanced gas-cooled reactor and Magnox reactor and *(b)* each United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority reactor at Dounreay and Winfrith is put.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No irradiated fuel from the United Kingdom generating boards' advanced gas-cooled reactors has yet been reprocessed. For details of the plutonium produced in the boards' magnox reactors and its uses, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) on 24 July 1987, at columns *515-16* and to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) on 16 December 1987, at column *516*.

Plutonium in the spent fuel from the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's prototype fast reactor is recovered at Dounreay and reused in the manufacture of fresh fuel. As the prototype is a net consumer of plutonium, the balance has to be made up from thermal reactors and this is supplied at Sellafield. All these processes are subject to safeguards.

The spent fuel from the UKAEA's steam generating heavy water reactor at Winfrith is stored under safeguards pending reprocessing in the THORP plant at Sellafield.

Nuclear Fuel

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether, after the co-processing of safeguarded and unsafeguarded spent nuclear fuel at BNFL Sellafield since May 1979, the nuclear materials have been deemed to be civil or military according to a pro rata system.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have nothing to add to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member on 11 March 1988, at column 362.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, in the light of his reply to the hon. Member for Chiselhurst (Mr. Sims), *Official Report*, 14 March, column *429*, on the increased cost limit to reply to parliamentary questions, he is now in a position to answer the questions put by the hon. Member for Newport, West on 26 November 1987, *Official Report*, column *279*, on safeguards.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas), *Official Report*, 16 March, column *593*, he will explain more fully the specific safeguards agreement covering the import of uranium from Durban on 28 February 1987.

Mr. Michael Spicer: All uranium imported into the United Kingdom for civil use is subject to Euratom safeguards and to the terms of the UK Euratom IAEA safeguards agreement.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether the European Commission has fully informed *(a)* the United Kingdom Government and *(b)* other Governments of the partner countries in supply and co-operation agreements or contracts of the safeguards conventions applied to the accountancy of nuclear materials subject to these agreements in mixed civil-military installations.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 29 February 1988, at column *481*.

River Aire (Flooding)

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has about recent flooding of the River Aire and its effects on a large opencast site in Yorkshire; what assessment is available to him of the danger of further flooding from the Aire and Calder canal if the banks continue to be eroded; if he will take action to ensure that the river and canal banks are secured; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I am advised by the British Coal Corporation that on Saturday 19 March the River Aire in West Yorkshire entered the St. Aidans opencast coal site through a breach in the river bank. A large volume of water remains within the site, which has temporarily ceased production, at a loss of 15,000 tonnes of coal per week output. No lives or property were lost during the incident.

Some erosion occurred on the river bank adjacent to the canal during the flooding. The position has now been stabilised and remedial work to the river bank is now substantially complete. There is now no danger of flooding from the canal.

British Coal is currently examining proposals with the relevant authorities which will permanantly repair the breached river bank and enable work to be resumed on the site.

NORTHERN IRELAND

ACE Funding

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to reinstate the ACE funding withdrawn from Twinbrook tenants and community association; and what interim arrangements have now been made for the provision of comparable services to the local community.

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend with responsibilities for such matters has no plans to reinstate ACE funding withdrawn from Twinbrook tenants and community Association. Forty-two ACE places are presently allocated for the provision of community services in the Twinbrook area.

Terrorists (Sentence Remission)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many convicted terrorists have been granted remission of part of their sentence since 1980; and how many committed subsequent crimes.

Mr. Stanley: During the period 1980 to 1987 a total of 5,109 inmates serving fixed sentences for scheduled offences were released with remission. Complete information on how many of these committed subsequent crimes is not readily available. However, a recent survey of a sample of former prisioners shows that some 40 per cent. of those released in 1984 from serving a sentence for a scheduled offence were subsequently convicted of either a scheduled or a non-scheduled offence committed within two years of their release.

Electricity Generation

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when a decision will be taken on the next phase of generating capacity in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: As the decision on the next phase of generating capacity to be provided in the Province will determine the future shape and scale of Northern Ireland Electricity's business, meaningful discussions on privatisation cannot be held until after that decision has been taken.

Lecturers

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost to public funds in each of the past five years of the investigation of all complaints by the Commissioner for Complaints, the Fair Employment Agency and the Equal Opportunities Commission regarding the selection or promotion of lecturing staff in further education colleges.

Mr. Viggers: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be compiled only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many complaints relating to the selection or promotion of lecturing staff in further education colleges were investigated by *(a)* the Commissioner for Complaints, *(b)* the Fair Employment Agency and *(c)* the Equal Opportunities Commission, in each of the past five years; and how many of these complaints were upheld.

Mr. Viggers: The available information is as follows:

	Northern Ireland commissioner for complaints		*Fair employment agency*	
	Investigated	*Upheld*	*Investigated*	*Upheld*
1983	2	1	3	1
1984	11	0	4	3
1985	3	0	3	2
1986	8	0	0	0
1987	[1]	[1]	[2]4	0

[1] This information is not available in advance of the laying before Parliament of the 1987 annual report of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints. The report is due to be laid in May 1988.

[2] Two pending.

The Equal Opportunities Commission does not segregate or record complaints by the complainant's occupation and would be unable to produce the information requested without disproportionate cost.

Prison Population

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* showing figures for the Northern Ireland prison population broken down into *(a)* male, *(b)* female and *(c)* juvenile, and showing each category the number of (i) Roman Catholics, (ii) Protestants and (iii) others.

Mr. Stanley: The information requested is as follows:

Northern Ireland prison population as at 31 March 1988 showing religious denominations as stated at time of committal to prison

	Roman Catholic	*Protestant*	*Others*	*Totals*
Male	799	933	5	1,737
Female	17	9	—	26
Juvenile	119	104	1	224
Totals	935	1,046	6	1,987

Juveniles are those inmates detained in young offenders centres and do not include young persons held on remand or under sentence in prison.

Public Bodies

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show the names of the members of each of *(a)* the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, *(b)* the Fair Employment Agency, *(c)* the Equal Opportunities Commission, *(d)* the Police Authority, and *(e)* the Police Complaints Board, indicating the date and term of appointment, and the sections of society or interest groups from which they were each drawn or represent.

Mr. Tom King *[holding answer 29 March 1988]:* I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

Sinn Fein

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions has he had with the Government of the Republic of Ireland about proscribing Sinn Fein; what was the view of the Government of the Republic on this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King *[holding answer 29 March 1988]:* Discussions with the Irish Government are generally confidential, in conformity with the usual international practice. The Government keep the question of proscription of a number of organisations under review.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Green Rates

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the gap between the United Kingdom green rates and the market rate; and how in real terms this gap compares with those of the other European Economic Community member states.

Mr. MacGregor: The real monetary gap (RMG) is the difference between a currency's green and market rates of exchange calculated as a percentage of the former. In sectors where monetary compensatory amounts (MCAs) apply, they are derived from the RMG by the subtraction of a "franchise". The real monetary gaps applying in the Community in the week commencing 11 April 1988 were:

Member state/Sector	Real monetary gap (per cent.)
United Kingdom	
Beef	−5·1
Crops	−13·8
Pigmeat	−7·6
Sheep	−14·4
Others	−12·2
Belgium	
Sheep	−2·0
Luxembourg	
All others	−0·5
Denmark	
Pigmeat	−0·5
Sheep	−4·1
Others	−2·0
France	
Beef	−2·0
Eggs and poultry	−5·3
Pigmeat	−1·5
Sheep	−4·1
Wine	−5·6
Others	−5·0
Germany	
Beef, sheep	+0·9
Cereals	+2·4
Others	+1·9
Greece	
Beef, milk	−49·5
Cereals	−39·1
Pigmeat	−39·0
Sheep	−24·2
Others	−45·4
Ireland	
Crops	−5·1
Milk, eggs and poultry	−5·0
Pigmeat	−3·6
Sheep	−6·9
Others	−3·5
Italy	
Cereals	−8·0
Fruit and vegetables	−5·9
Pigmeat	−3·1
Sheep	−11·0
Wine	−7·6
Others	−7·0
Netherlands	
Beef	+0·3
Cereals	+1·9
Milk	+1·4
Others	+1·3
Portugal	
Sheep, structures	−4·7
Fishery products	−9·7
Others	−10·9
Spain	
Crops	−1·8
Sheep	−3·4
Others	−0·8

Monetary Compensatory Amounts

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking to consult other European Economic Community members both on a formal and informal basis as to the removal of monetary compensatory amounts to help the pig farming industry.

Mr. MacGregor: I raised this issue in the opening discussions on the Commission's price proposals which took place at the meeting of the Agricultural Council on 28/29 March. I stressed the acute problems faced by United Kingdom pig producers and that pigmeat MCAs were producing distortions in competition. I urged an immediate complete devaluation for the green pound in this sector, as part of the price-fixing proposals.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to the attitude of other European Economic Community countries to monetary compensatory amounts.

Mr. MacGregor: A number of member states are seeking MCA changes.

Farming Industry (Assistance)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is being done to revive the farming industry in the light of current levels of production.

Mr. MacGregor: The agriculture industry requires a stable framework of policy against which to plan its business decisions. This was lacking while CAP spending was not subject to proper budgetary control and while exhaustion of CAP funds, notably on storage and disposal of surpluses, threatened the collapse of the system. The decisions reached on CAP reform at the recent European Council have averted that threat and provided a clearer framework within which farmers can now plan ahead.

Radioactivity

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he is investigating the possibility of having aerial monitoring for measuring radioactivity on agricultural land; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: This possibility is being actively investigated, in the light of relevant information on technical performance and cost effectiveness of current proposals.

Bass

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the representations he has had about his proposals for bass fishing; how many fishery protection offices are responsible for the Channel; and if he will list the number of prosecutions for undersize bass and the level of fines imposed.

Mr. Gummer: We have received over 100 representations on the proposals for the management of the bass fishery published on 29 February.

The Ministry's Sea Fisheries Inspectorate, which undertakes a wide range of duties, has 25 officers operating from nine offices situated along the Channel coast. Since the introduction of the Community minimum landing size of 32cm. in January 1987 there have been no prosecutions by the Ministry for landing undersize bass, but one case is pending.

Food Surpluses

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the amount to be expended per week in disposing of food surpluses following the decisions of the European Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The 1988 draft budget provides for Community expenditure on export refunds and internal disposal subsidies (including stock depreciation and loss on sale out of intervention) for commodities in structural surplus (cereals, sugar, olive oil, wine, beef, milk and milk products) of £221 million per week. This figure is not comparable with earlier years because systematic stock depreciation of new stocks is now included for the first time.

Production Subsidies

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his latest estimate of the sum to be expected by his Department on the financing of agricultural production and export of produce in the current financial year, in the light of the decisions at the European Council.

Mr. MacGregor: Expenditure in the United Kingdom on production subsidies and export refunds (net of MCAs) is expected to be £950 million in 1988-89.

Agricultural Production

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) by what date the United Kingdom will be required to introduce the scheme for set-aside for agricultural land agreed at the European Council on 11 to 13 February;

(2) by what date the United Kingdom is required to introduce a scheme for *(a)* set-aside and *(b)* extensification of the production of surplus products; and when these decisions were taken in the European Council;

(3) if he has yet introduced an aid scheme designed to encourage the extensification of production, as required by European Council regulation A60/87.

Mr. MacGregor: In accordance with the decisions of the European Council, regulation 1760/87 is being superseded by a new regulation providing both for set-aside of arable land and for extensification by reduction of production. The Council of Agriculture Ministers agreed on 8-9 March that set-aside schemes should be introduced by member states within two months of the adoption of the Commission implementing rules, decisions on which are to be taken by 30 April 1988. Extensification is to be implemented by 1 January 1989, but until 31 December 1989 member states may restrict this to beef and veal and to wine.

EAGGF and Set-aside Scheme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the annual cost to *(a)* the European agricultural guarantee and guidance fund, and *(b)* the United Kingdom of the set-aside scheme agreed at the European Council meeting held on 11-13 February.

Mr. MacGregor: No estimate of the annual cost to EAGGF has been released by the Commission. For the United Kingdom, public expenditure planning totals were increased in the last survey by £16 million for 1989-90 and £22 million for 1990-91 to cover the cost of set-aside and extensification.

Food Aid

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if when planning the distribution of surplus European Community beef and butter, he will make it his policy to have regard to the problems experienced at the previous distribution; and what steps he will take to improve the arrangements;

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that organisations which will be authorised to distribute European Community surplus beef and butter are better equipped than they were last time to carry out the task; and what additional help he is making available to that end.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 31 March 1988]:* The free food scheme, which was the subject of my right hon. Friend's announcement on 12 January, is more limited than the 1987 scheme and different in form. In particular, we shall be designating organisations which are willing and capable to handling butter and beef withdrawn from intervention stores and of arranging for its distribution exclusively to eligible recipients with due safeguards against abuse or risks to health. Designated organisations will be eligible to receive contributions from Community funds for costs of administration and transport.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he is planning to distribute surplus European Community beef and butter to retirement pensioners and others in need; through which organisations he is planning to do this in Devon; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 31 March 1988]:* I shall be announcing the list of designated organisations as soon as possible: once designated, organisations will be entitled to withdraw butter and beef from intervention stores for distribution.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much European Community surplus beef and butter is available for distribution in the United Kingdom; and what steps he is taking to see that it is fairly distributed.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 31 March 1988]:* The quantities to be distributed will depend on the allocation from the Commission, on which I would refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 31 March at column *638*, to the hon. Member for Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins). As for distribution arrangements, my right hon. Friend announced on 12 January that butter and beef would be made available on response to specific applications from suitable organisations. I shall have regard to the coverage of distribution and other factors in deciding which organisations should be designated under the scheme.

Food and Environment Protection Act 1985

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many notices have been issued under sections 19(5) and 19(6), respectively, of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 since the Act came into force.

Mr. Nicholls: I have been asked to reply as under an agency agreement, the Health and Safety Executive became the enforcing authority for part III of the Act and its regulations on 27 June 1987.

Between that date and 31 December 1987 32 enforcement notices were served, 29 under section 19(5) and three under section 19(6).

THE ARTS

Arts Council

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts what the total grant from the Arts Council to the 12 English regional arts associations is for 1988-89; and what percentage increase this represents over 1987-88.

Mr. Luce: The total of basic allocations for 1988-89 is £28,946,840, which represents a 2·7 percentage increase over the total of total allocations for 1987-88. Additional development moneys have not yet been allocated by the Arts Council to individual RAAs, but once this is done the increase will be of the order of 3 per cent.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will publish a table showing *(a)* his office's grant to the Arts Council in cash terms in each year since 1979-80 up to and including 1988-89 and *(b)* each of those years' grant as a percentage of 1979-80.

Mr. Luce: The information requested is follows:

	Arts council grant	*Percentage of 1979-80*
	£	
1979-80	61,476,000	100
1980-81	70,470,000	114·6
1981-82	80,361,000	130·7
1982-83	90,850,000	147·8
1983-84	94,580,000	153·8
1984-85	100,000,000	162·7
1985-86	105,000,000	170·8
1986-87	135,600,000	220·6
1987-88	138,400,000	225·1
1988-89	150,000,000	244·0

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he will publish a table which expresses the Arts Council grant to *(a)* the National Theatre, *(b)* the Royal Shakespeare Company, *(c)* the English National Opera and *(d)* the Royal Opera House in each year from 1979-80 to 1988-89 as a percentage of 1979-80.

Mr. Richard Luce: The information requested is as follows:

	National Theatre	*Royal Shakespeare Company*	*English National Opera*	*Royal Opera House*
1979-80	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
1980-81	107·9	119·8	114·1	111·5
1981-82	120·0	136·0	95·2	128·9
1982-83	136·3	192·5	113·3	148·3
1983-84	142·9	220·1	124·8	165·5
1984-85	145·8	249·7	123·3	177·0
1985-86	144·7	254·7	125·7	192·5
1986-87	162·5	245·5	137·0	187·1
1987-88	162·5	245·5	140·6	189·0
1988-89	162·5	251·6	144·1	192·7

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he will publish a table which shows the Arts Council grants to *(a)* the National Theatre, *(b)* the Royal Shakespeare Company, *(c)* the English National Opera, and *(d)* the Royal Opera House, in each year from 1979-80 to 1988-89.

Mr. Luce: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) on 16 February 1988 at column *570*.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts what additional sum would be required to restore the real value of the Office of Arts and Libraries' grant to the Arts Council to the level of 1979-80.

Mr. Luce: None. If the Arts Council's grant had remained constant in real terms, it would have been about £112 million in 1988-89. In fact, it will be £127 million excluding post-abolition funding.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts what additional sum would be required to restore the real value of the Arts Council grant to the level of 1979-80 for *(a)* the National Theatre, *(b)* the Royal Shakespeare Company, *(c)* the English National Opera and *(d)* the Royal Opera House.

Mr. Luce: The National Theatre and English National Opera would need cash increases of £954,418 and £1,836,964 respectively.

The Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal Opera House already receive more than the 1979-80 level in real terms.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts what additional sum would be required to restore the real value of the Arts Council grant to each of the 12 English regional arts associations to the level of 1979-80.

Mr. Luce: I have excluded abolition money from the answer, but in every case, the 1988-89 grant is well above the real-terms equivalent of the 1979-80 grant, as the following table shows:

RAA	1979-80 Total Grant	1988-89 Real Term Equivalent	1988-89 Basic Grant (Abolition money excluded)
Eastern	419,398	768,024	1,942,560
East Midlands	428,033	783,837	1,976,625
Greater London	652,301	1,194,528	2,916,397
Lincs/Humberside	335,893	615,105	955,920
Merseyside	338,147	619,233	735,907
Northern	1,088,960	1,994,161	2,285,515
North West	578,474	1,059,332	1,768,557
Southern	525,050	961,499	1,647,615
South East	318,807	583,816	1,380,330
South West	535,794	981,174	1,765,500
West Midlands	696,735	1,275,898	2,064,108
Yorkshire	444,425	813,854	1,521,769

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will publish in the *Official Report* tables showing *(a)* the Arts Council's grant to each of the 12 regional arts associations in cash terms in each year since 1979-80 up to and including 1988-89 and *(b)* each of those years' grants as a percentage of 1979-80.

Mr. Luce: The information requested is as follows:

	Eastern		East Midlands		Greater London	
	£	Percentage	£	Percentage	£	Percentage
1979-80	419,398	100·0	428,033	100·0	652,301	100·0
1980-81	481,180	114·7	579,874	135·5	932,101	142·9
1981-82	541,045	129·0	699,754	163·5	1,209,972	185·5
1982-83	690,483	164·6	824,944	192·7	1,464,087	224·4
1983-84	728,305	173·7	927,160	216·6	1,487,240	228·0
1984-85	889,775	212·2	1,061,119	247·9	1,583,722	242·8
1985-86	1,144,871	273·0	1,627,406	380·2	1,791,430	274·6
1986-87	1,715,344	409,0	1,809,737	422·8	8,427,313	1,292·0
1987-88	1,774,026	423·0	1,873,783	437·8	8,127,248	1,245·9
1988-89	1,942,560	463·2	1,976,625	461·8	7,903,175	1,211·6

	Lincolnshire and Humberside		Merseyside		Northern	
	£	Percentage	£	Percentage	£	Percentage
1979-80	335,893	100·0	338,147	100·0	1,088,960	100·0
1980-81	390,747	116·3	386,083	114·2	1,306,630	120·0
1981-82	460,691	137·2	444,877	131·6	1,456,051	133·7
1982-83	523,048	155·7	497,419	147·1	1,733,236	159·2
1983-84	556,740	165·7	535,158	158·3	1,819,020	167·0
1984-85	591,050	176·0	583,903	172·7	1,938,659	178·0
1985-86	782,836	233·0	656,000	194·0	2,086,802	191·6
1986-87	904,490	269·3	1,096,830	324·4	3,543,845	325·4
1987-88	962,235	286·5	1,094,270	323·6	3,556,920	326·6
1988-89	955,920	284·6	1,102,155	326·0	3,526,910	323·9

	North West		Southern		South East	
	£	percentage	£	percentage	£	percentage
1979-80	578,474	100·0	525,050	100·0	318,807	100·0
1980-81	662,483	114·6	618,638	117·8	367,495	115·3
1981-82	751,055	129·8	708,620	135·0	431,274	135·3
1982-83	864,849	149·5	850,418	162·0	540,353	169·5
1983-84	932,393	161·2	884,447	168·4	581,659	182·4
1984-85	1,031,953	178·4	995,088	189·5	628,991	197·3
1985-86	1,493,749	258·2	1,172,470	223·3	1,085,773	340·6
1986-87	1,982,320	342·7	1,298,559	247·3	1,231,962	386·4
1987-88	1,996,480	345·1	1,369,191	260·8	1,303,970	409·0
1988-89	2,144,570	370·7	1,647,615	313·8	1,380,330	433·0

	South West		West Midlands		Yorkshire	
	£	percentage	£	percentage	£	percentage
1979-80	535,794	100·0	696,735	100·0	444,425	100·0
1980-81	637,082	118·9	803,105	115·3	520,779	117·2
1981-82	702,175	131·1	896,095	128·6	586,900	132·1
1982-83	876,133	163·5	1,034,811	148·5	717,002	161·3
1983-84	883,678	164·9	1,100,434	157·9	737,914	166·0
1984-85	970,894	181·2	1,221,727	175·4	841,602	189·4
1985-86	1,225,052	228·6	1,558,134	223·6	1,338,899	301·3

	South West		West Midlands		Yorkshire	
	£	percentage	£	percentage	£	percentage
1986-87	1,555,765	290·4	2,291,310	328·9	2,084,900	469·1
1987-88	1,685,317	314·5	2,315,020	332·3	2,117,070	476·4
1988-89	1,765,500	329·5	2,451,180	351·8	2,150,300	483·8

Figures for 1979-80 to 1987-88 are total allocations; the figures for 1988-89, however, are basic allocations as total allocations for 1988-89 have not yet been made by the Arts Council who will allocate some development money to some regions. The 1979-80 to 1987-88 grant figures have already been given in my reply to the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) on 16 February 1988 at columns *571-72*.

Museums (Storage Space)

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister of the Arts what is his estimate, in the light of the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General on the management of museums and galleries, HC 394, of the cost of providing adequate storage space at *(a)* the Victoria and Albert museum and *(b)* the British museum.

Mr. Luce: It is for the trustees of these two museums, and of the other national museums and galleries, to assess their institutions' storage needs and the cost of satisfying them, and to determine the priority that should be given to this purpose in their strategic plans.

I have provided a major new storage facility of 32,000 m^2 at Blyth road, Hammersmith for the use in particular of the British museum, the Victoria and Albert and the science museum. A total of some £11 million has so far been spent from the arts programme on the acquisition and refurbishment of this facility, in which further investment is planned for the future.

British Museum

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts what he estimates will be the cost of restoring *(a)* the Greek and Roman antiquities, *(b)* the drawings in the Satin collection; and *(c)* the letters, fragments and objects in the cuneiform table collection in the British museum.

Mr. Luce: The keeping of the British museum's collections is the responsibility of the museum's board of trustees. It is for them to assess the cost of restoring part of those collections. I will make inquiries and write to the hon. Member, and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

CIVIL SERVICE

Agencies

Mr. Allen: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service which Civil Service units, presently housed at the Chalfont drive Government buildings in Nottingham, are under consideration for the agency proposals recently announced.

Mr. Luce: Of the civil servants who currently work at Chalfont drive, Nottingham, I understand that only those from Her Majesty's Stationery Office and the Department of Employment are involved in the list of the first candidates for agencies announced on 18 February this year.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Tax Allowances

Mr. Barron: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many women currently receive both the wife's earned income allowance and the married man's tax allowance.

Mr. Norman Lamont: It is estimated that in 1988-89 about half a million married women will have both the wife's earned income allowance and the married man's tax allowance set against their earnings.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for 1987-88 the number of tax units claiming *(a)* the dependent relative allowance, *(b)* the housekeeper allowance, and *(c)* the son's or daughter's services allowance; and if he will give for each of these the cost of the allowance to the Exchequer in 1987-88, and the projected cost for 1988-89 had the allowances been retained.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The information is given in the table:

	Number of tax units claiming the allowance (thousands)	Cost of the allowance 1987-88 (£ million)	1988-89 (£ million)
Dependent relative allowance	360	10	10
Housekeeper allowance	5	under ¼	under ¼
Son's or daughter's services allowance	2	negligible	negligible

Estimates are based on a projection of the 1985-86 survey of personal income and are therefore provisional.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many separated or divorced parents at present opt to claim two separate additional personal allowances; and if he will give the cost to the Exchequer of these claimants in 1987-88 and the projected cost had the allowance continued to be allowed to both parents in 1989-90.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Information about the numbers of separated or divorced parents claiming the additional personal allowance is not available. Under the Budget proposals, separated or divorced parents who are eligible will both continue to be able to claim the additional personal allowance in 1989-90 except where the parent making the claim is one of an unmarried couple living together as husband and wife and that couple have more than one child between them.

Income Tax

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the cost of reducing the basic rate of income tax to 20 per cent.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The cost of reducing the basic rate of income tax from 25 per cent. to 20 per cent. in 1988-89 is estimated to be £6·4 billion in 1988-89 and £8 billion in 1989-90. These estimates include the costs of the consequential reduction in the rate of advance corporation tax.

Credit Card Companies

Mr. Butler: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the implications of the rates of interest charged by the major credit companies for his policy of reducing inflation.

Mr. Lilley: Credit card borrowing represents less than 5 per cent. of total personal debt. So the impact of credit card interest rates both as a cost and as restraint on the growth of total liquidity is correspondingly small. However, credit card services have been referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission by the Director General of Fair Trading.

Exchange Rate

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the present level of exchange rate and its effects on the economy.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend receives representations on the exchange rate and its effects on the economy whatever its level.

Freeports

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the present position of his review of existing freeport operations; and what plans he is considering for the expansion of freeport status to other ports.

Mr. Lilley: On 17 December 1987, at columns *651-52*, I gave my considered response to the report by Customs and Excise of its review of VAT and other aspects of free zones.

Credit Controls

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to reintroduce credit controls; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: No.

Mortgage Repayments

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from individual taxpayers about the extent to which recently announced increases in mortgage repayments counteract the effects on their real disposable income of the tax reductions announced in his Budget Statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: None.

Queen's Warehousekeeper

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the salary of the Queen's warehousekeeper; and how many staff are employed at his office.

Mr. Lilley: One or more Queen's warehouses is located in each of the 21 regional collections of Customs and Excise according to the nature and volume of local passenger and freight traffic. Day-to-day responsibility is normally laid to staff at executive or higher executive officer level, who currently receive a maximum salary of £10,292 or £12,878 a year respectively outside London. They may be supported by up to three other staff according to the needs of the work.

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many goods, and to what approximate value, presently remain unclaimed at the office of the Queen's warehousekeeper; and what happens to these goods after six months.

Mr. Lilley: Records are not kept centrally of goods seized and detained that remain unclaimed at individual Queen's warehouses. Where goods are detained pending the production of an import licence they are liable to be seized and disposed of if a licence is not produced within a reasonable time. Since the circumstances of particular importations can vary significantly, no single period is set for disposal.

Loxodonta Africana

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many items of loxodonta Africana were detained by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in 1987 and subsequently given approval for importation by the endangered species branch of the Department of the Environment.

Mr. Lilley: Records of such detentions are not maintained centrally and the information sought could be obtained only at disproportionate expense.

EC (UK Contribution)

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the net contribution which the United Kingdom will require to make to the European Economic Community in the financial year 1987-88, in the light of the decisions taken at the European Council.

Mr. Brooke: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 31 March at column *601*.

Taxation Statistics

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give *(a)* the percentage of average wages paid in tax of all kinds for each year since 1979, *(b)* the percentage paid in income tax and *(c)* the percentage paid in indirect taxes for each of those years.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The figures in the table refer to a married man on average male earnings. It is assumed that his wife has no earnings, that he is not contracted out of SERPS and that they have no children. The figures do not include domestic rates.

Taxes as a percentage of gross earnings for a married man on average earnings

	Income tax NIC and indirect taxes	*Income tax*	*Indirect taxes*
1978-79	39·6	21·3	11·8
1979-80	39·1	19·8	12·8
1980-81	40·0	20·6	12·7

	Income tax NIC and indirect taxes	*Income tax*	*Indirect taxes*
1981-82	42·4	21·5	13·1
1982-83	42·4	21·0	12·6
1983-84	42·4	20·6	12·8
1984-85	42·5	20·2	13·3
1985-86	42·3	20·0	13·3
1986-87	41·7	19·4	13·3
1987-88	40·5	18·4	13·1
1988-89	39·3	17·0	13·3

EC Intergovernmental Agreement

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what sum he expects will be raised by the proposed intergovernmental agreement described in European Commission document COM (88) 81; what is the purpose of the proposal; what is the part of the draft budget to which it relates, expressing those sums in both European currency units and pound sterling, together with the terms of any reimbursement; and what is the method by which Her Majesty's Government propose to seek parliamentary approval for this draft agreement.

Mr. Brooke: As I said in reply to my hon. Friends the Members for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) on 24 February, at columns *194-96*, and for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) on 9 March, at columns *208-9*, respectively, the Intergovernmental agreement (IGA) was provided for in the conclusions of the Brussels European Council on 11-12 February. Its purpose is to cover the Community's 1988 budget requirements in excess of the existing own resources ceiling pending entry into force of the new own resources decision. The amount which member states would contribute under the IGA depends on the level at which the 1988 budget is eventually adopted. The provisional and indicative amount in respect of the draft budget established at the Economic and Finance Council on 7 March is 7·647 billion ecu (around £5·304 billion), with a United Kingdom contribution of 1·263 billion ecu (around £0·876 billion). The IGA would not be related to any particular part of the budget. It would take the form of non-repayable advances corresponding to the new fourth resource.

Parliament's approval for the IGA will be sought before the money is paid to the Community, probably by means of a special Estimate or by a Bill—following the precedent of the 1984 or 1985 IGAs respectively. The method chosen will depend mainly on the timing of the necessary formal agreements between member states.

Policy Work (Financial Management Initiative)

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made in applying the financial management initiative to policy work.

Mr. Major: Since my predecessor's announcement of 10 June 1985, at column *294*, Departments have made considerable improvements, particularly in evaluation. The Treasury has today published "Policy Evaluation: A Guide for Managers", which builds on the work which has been done in Departments and which sets out the approach which has been found most useful. I am arranging for copies of this guide, and of the accompanying press release which describes the background, to be sent to the hon. Member and to be placed in the Library of the House.

Staff Productivity and Efficiency

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken to assess the effect on the productivity and efficiency of staff in his own Department of the tax cuts announced in his Budget Statement.

Mr. Brooke: The reductions in income tax rates proposed in the Budget will improve incentives for all taxpayers, including the staff in my Department, and will encourage individual effort generally by allowing people to keep more of what they earn.

Personal Incomes

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for each of the top *(a)* 1 per cent., *(b)* 5 per cent., *(c)* 10 per cent., and *(d)* the remaining 90 per cent. of taxpayers (i) the total amount of income before tax and (ii) the total amount of income after tax for each of the years 1978-79 to 1987-88.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 10 March 1988]:* Estimates are given in the tables for 1978-79 and 1983-84 to 1987-88. Information for other years could be provided only at disproportionate cost. All estimates are based on information reported to tax offices and collected through the annual surveys of personal incomes. For years before 1985-86, estimates exclude employees' contributions to occupational pension schemes and some investment income on which tax is deducted at source.

Shares of income tax payers' total income before tax

	Financial year					
	1978-79	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*[1]	*1986-87*[1]	*1987-88*[1]
Top 1 per cent.						
Amount £ billion	5·1	9·7	10·9	13·6	14·6	16·1
Share per cent.	5	5	5	6	6	6
Top 5 per cent.						
Amount £ billion	15·0	28·3	31·4	36·4	39·4	43·3
Share per cent.	15	16	16	16	16	17
Top 10 per cent.						
Amount £ billion	24·3	45·0	49·6	56·7	61·4	67·4
Share per cent.	24	25	25	25	26	26

	Financial year					
	1978-79	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*[1]	*1986-87*[1]	*1987-88*[1]
Remaining 90 per cent.						
Amount £ billion	78·5	136·0	147·0	166·0	178·0	192·0
Share per cent.	76	75	75	75	74	74
All taxpayers						
Amount £ billion	102·8	181·0	197·0	223·0	239·0	259·0
Share per cent.	100	100	100	100	100	100

Shares of income tax payers' total income after tax

	Financial year					
	1978-79	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*[1]	*1986-87*[1]	*1987-88*[1]
Top 1 per cent.						
Amount £ billion	2·7	5·9	6·7	8·1	8·7	9·5
Share per cent.	3	4	4	4	4	4
Top 5 per cent.						
Amount £ billion	10·1	19·8	22·0	25·2	27·3	30·0
Share per cent.	12	13	14	14	14	14
Top 10 per cent.						
Amount £ billion	17·3	32·9	36·2	41·2	44·8	49·6
Share per cent.	21	22	22	23	23	23
Remaining 90 per cent.						
Amount £ billion	65·2	115·0	125·0	142·0	152·0	166·0
Share per cent.	79	78	78	77	77	77
All taxpayers						
Amount £ billion	82·6	147·0	162·0	183·0	197·0	215·0
Share per cent.	100	100	100	100	100	100

[1] Provisional; includes estimates of occupational pension contributions and investment income not reported to tax offices.

Seabed Mooring Rentals

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has on the increases in sea bed mooring rentals recently proposed by the Crown Estate Commissioners.

Mr. Lawson *[holding answer 29 March 1988]:* Mooring charges around the United Kingdom generally are reviewed at regular intervals in fulfilment of the Crown Estate Commissioners' statutory responsibilities. I am informed by the Crown Estate Commissioners that mooring rates applicable to the Clyde estuary within the jurisdiction of the Clyde moorings committee have recently been revised from 1 January 1988. (The previous review took effect in January 1981). The new rates are:

£ per annum per mooring

	1 January 1988	*1 January 1990*
Single mooring	37	42
2-5 moorings	25	30
6-9 moorings	20	25
10 or more moorings	18	23

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what revenues were yielded to the Crown Estate Commissioners in each of the past 10 years from seabed mooring rentals; and what information he has on the formula on which such rentals are assessed.

Mr. Lawson *[holding answer 29 March 1988]:* Information on revenues is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The Crown Estate is now computerising its accounting systems in a way which will enable information of this type to be provided in the future.

The Crown Estate's charges for seabed used for mooring purposes are recommended by the district valuers of the Inland revenue valuation office in pursuance of section 3(1) of the Crown Estate Act 1961 and undertakings given to Parliament during the passage of that Act.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many boat owners in each coastal area around the United Kingdom pay seabed moorings rentals to the Crown Estate Commissioners *(a)* individually and *(b)* through moorings associations formed for the purpose.

Mr. Lawson *[holding answer 29 March 1988]:* The information on the number of boat owners who pay a licence fee or rental direct to the Crown Estate is not readily available and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

The Crown Estate does not hold information on the number of boat owners who may currently have moorings within all areas of Crown seabed leased to mooring associations or fairway committees. There are also many other forms of letting arrangements which regulate the placing of moorings including leases to yacht clubs, harbour and port authorities, commercial boatyards and others.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has on the steps being taken by the Crown Estate Commissioners to identify seabed moorings on which no rental is currently being paid and on the sanctions being proposed.

Mr. Lawson *[holding answer 29 March 1988]:* Visits are made as frequently as necessary to all parts of the estate by agents and officials of the Crown Estate. This does result in the identification of unauthorised uses of Crown Estate interests including moorings. Amicable arrangements are always sought to regularise the situation with the user of the moorings concerned either individually or by suitable group arrangements but civil remedies are available should they prove necessary.

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

Mr. Clay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the total cost of mortgage interest tax relief in 1988-89, *(b)* the average value of relief per mortgagor, *(c)* the numbers receiving mortgage relief broken down into the following income ranges: under £4,000, £4,000 to £5,000, £5,000 to £6,000, £6,000 to £7,000, £7,000 to £8,000, £8,000 to £9,000, £9,000 to £10,000, £10,000 to £12,000, £12,000 to £15,000, £15,000 to £20,000, £20,000 to £25,000, £25,000 to £30,000, over £30,000.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 30 March 1988]:* Provisional estimates based on the proposed rates of ax for 1988-89 are given in the table. They are derived from projections of data from the 1985-86 survey of personal incomes and the 1985 family expenditure survey. The estimates include mortgages formerly under the option mortgage scheme, which are now subsumed within MIRAS.

Tax units[1] receiving mortgage interest relief by range of total income for 1988-89

Range of total income (£'000)	*Number receiving mortgage interest relief* (thousands)	*Average value of relief per mortgagor* (£)	*Total cost of relief* (£ million)
Under 4	550	320	180
4 to 5	140	340	50
5 to 6	130	370	50
6 to 7	210	380	80
7 to 8	280	390	110
8 to 9	330	420	140
9 to 10	350	440	150
10 to 12	1,000	480	480
12 to 15	1,440	510	730
15 to 20	1,880	520	980
20 to 25	1,120	530	590
25 to 30	470	680	320
Over 30	700	910	640
Total	8,600	520	4,500

[1] Single persons and married couples.

Mr. Clay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the tax threshold, *(b)* tax free income, and *(c)* break-even points at current prices, at 1949-50 prices, and as a percentage of average manual earnings for a single person, married man without children, married man with two children and married man with four children in 1978-79 and 1988-89.

Mr. Lamont *[holding answer 30 March 1988]:* The information is in the table.

Income tax thresholds, tax free income and break-even points

Tax Year	*Threshold at current prices*	*Threshold at 1949-50 prices*	*Threshold as percentage of average manual earnings*[1]	*Tax free income*[2] *at current prices*	*Tax free income at 1949-50 prices*	*Tax free income as percentage of average manual earnings*[1]	*Break-even point*[3] *at current prices*	*Break-even point*[3] *at 1949-50 prices*	*Break-even point*[3] *as percentage of average manual earnings*[1]
	£	£	per cent.	£	£	per cent.	£	£	per cent.
Single person									
1978-79	985	171	22·0	985	171	22·0	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1988-89[4]	2,605	216	24·2	2,605	216	24·2	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Married man—no children									
1978-79	1,535	266	34·3	1,535	266	34·3	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1988-89[4]	4,095	339	38·0	4,095	339	38·0	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Married man—with two children[5]									
1978-79	1,735	300	38·8	2,002	346	44·7	2,727	472	61·0
1988-89[4]	4,095	339	38·0	4,849	402	45·0	7,111	589	65·9
Married man—with four children[6]									
1978-79	2,035	352	45·5	2,570	445	57·5	3,836	664	85·8
1988-89[4]	4,095	339	38·0	5,603	464	52·0	10,127	839	93·9

[1] Average manual earnings are for full-time males aged over 21 working a full week.
[2] Tax-free income is defined as the tax threshold plus child benefit.
[3] Break-even point is the level of income at which income tax liability is equal to the money received through child benefit. It therefore gives the level of income above which the family pays more income tax than it obtains in benefits for children.
[4] On the basis of the 1988 Budget proposals. Estimates of thresholds and break-even points as a percentage of earnings are provisional.
[5] Both children aged under 11.
[6] Two children aged under 11, one aged between 11 and 15 and one aged 16 or over.

ENVIRONMENT

Property Services Agency (Doncaster)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many buildings the Property Services Agency rents for Government Departments in the Doncaster metropolitan borough council area; and what is the annual cost and the rent per square metre.

Mr. Chope: The Property Services Agency rents 21 buildings in the Doncaster metropolitan borough council area. The average rent is £27·82 per sq m and the annual costs are as follows:

	£
Rents	394,825
Rates	314,441

	£
Landlords service charges	33,961
Insurance	3,657
Maintenance	132,502
Utilities	87,442
	966,828

Tourism

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the impact on the environment of Suffolk and Norfolk caused by tourists.

Mrs. Roe: The Government support the policies of local authorities and other bodies in promoting and providing for the tourist industry while preventing unacceptable effects upon the environment. So far as Norfolk and Suffolk are concerned, the structure plans for those counties, both recently approved by the Secretary of State, contain appropriate policies for controlling tourism development.

Pollution

Mr. Allan Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make a statement on the Government's policy regarding staged percentage reductions in emissions of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and dust from large combustion plants in the United Kingdom within the context of the proposed European directive on large combustion plants and as to the dates by which the proposed percentage reductions will be achieved in the United Kingdom;

(2) if he will make a statement on the reason for the rejection by Her Majesty's Government of the compromise proposals put forward by the Federal Republic of Germany, at the meeting of the Council of Environment Ministers on 21 March, on emissions of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and dust from large combustion plants.

Mr. Moynihan: On 30 March the Department submitted a memorandum on the large combustion plants directive, which addresses the issues raised by the hon. Member, to the Environment Select Committee which is currently conducting an inquiry on air pollution. Copies of the memorandum are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Allan Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what estimates he had of the total cost to the United Kingdom car industry of meeting emission limits of HC + NOx = 8g/test and CO = 30g/test for the second stage of regulations affecting small cars, below 1·4 litre engine capacity, within the terms of the European directive on emissions of air pollution from petrol-engined vehicles; what would be the increase in the average cost of manufacture of each vehicle; and what percentage of the extra cost of production would be passed on to the consumer;

(2) what estimates he had of the additional cost to the United Kingdom car industry of meeting emission limits of HC + NOx = 5g/test and CO = 20g/test, proposed by the European Commission for the second stage of regulation affecting small cars, below 1·4 litre engine capacity, within the terms of the European directive on emissions of air pollution from petrol-engined vehicles, compared with meeting the emission standards of HC + NOx = 8g/test and CO = 30g/test;

(3) if he will make a statement on the reasons for the rejection by Her Majesty's Government at the Council of Environment Ministers on 21 March, of the compromise proposals put forward by the European Commission on emissions of nitrogen oxides, hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide from new cars with petrol engines smaller than 1·4 litres.

Mr. Moynihan: The European Directive 88/76/EEC on gaseous emissions from cars, gave limit values for three vehicle categories. It recognised that the market for small cars, below 1·4 litre engine capacity, was the most sensitive to cost and fuel consumption. Accordingly the limits set for small cars were less stringent than those for medium and large cars. The recent proposal put forward by the European Commission for the second stage limits for small cars, as part of the Luxembourg agreement, was 30g/test for CO and 8g/test for HCs + NOx. These are also the limits for medium cars in 88/76/EEC. The United Kingdom Government, in common with several other member states, believes that the limits would place disproportionate costs on small cars. We remain to be convinced that the proposed limits would not entail an increase in motoring costs out of proportion to the benefits obtained.

The average increase in costs to meet the Commission's proposals are estimated to be £100/vehicle. The annual costs to the car industry are estimated to be £100 million. It is a matter for the motor industry to decide what percentage of the extra cost is to be passed on to the motorist.

Some member states are seeking limits of 20g/test for CO and 5g/test for HCs + NOx. To meet these limits the estimated annual increase in manufacturers' costs compared to the Commission proposal is a further £150 million.

Canals and Waterways

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what requests he has received for assistance from organisations whose interests are to develop canals and waterways throughout the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: Applications have been received from five canal societies concerned with waterway restoration for funding under the Department's special grants programme 1988-89. Decisions on these will be given shortly. The Department has also had notice of a proposed application for assistance from the European regional development fund in respect of the upper reaches of the Manchester ship canal.

Shopping Developments

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance has been issued to planning authorities in respect of the criteria to be applied in consideration of applications for regional shopping developments and their effect on existing shopping facilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Roe: Guidance on these issues is given in a planning policy guidance note on major retail development (PPG6) issued jointly by my Department and the Welsh Office on 20 January this year. Copies are in the Library.

Merseyside Development Corporation

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Birkenhead of 17 March, if he will appoint women to the Merseyside development corporation board.

Mr. Trippier: Board members are appointed on the basis of their ability to do the job. Members include people with a special knowledge of the locality and appropriate business or professional experience. My right hon. Friend will appoint suitable people, women or men, as appropriate.

Greenham Common

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to review the common land designation of Greenham common; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has no powers to review common land designations.

Local Authorities (Rating and Capital Expenditure)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he had with local authorities in Cornwall before his statement on the subject on 9 March concerning his plan to outlaw a number of kinds of leaseback and other accounting arrangements.

Mr. Chope: The measures announced by my right hon. Friend on 9 March were not preceded by any consultation because, as he explained in his statement, prior consultation would have rendered the measures ineffective. But the amending regulations made on 9 March are temporary and my right hon. Friend is now consulting local government about whether any changes or clarification are required before permanent regulations are made.

Nuclear Materials (Mislabelling)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will initiate an investigation into the links between *(a)* Rio Tinto Zinc (UK) Ltd., *(b)* Imperial Smelting Corporation (UK) Ltd., *(c)* Nuclear Transport Ltd., and *(d)* British Nuclear Fuels plc ad Transnuklear and Nukem in the Federal Republic of Germany, currently under investigation for corrupt practices and mislabelling of nuclear materials by the European Commission and the European Parliament.

Mr. Moynihan: No. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no responsibility for links between, or the commercial operations of, these companies.

Unity Houses (Southend)

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment why his Department advised Southend borough council on 8 March (ref: ENV/PS/HAS) that its request for a higher expenditure limit for reinstating 17 Unity homes should be rejected; and what steps he has taken to satisfy himself that the work involved can be completed satisfactorily within the limits set by his Department.

Mrs. Roe: Although each individual limit approved was considerably higher than the national eligible expenditure limit for Unity houses (currently £20,000), the basic repair costs requested by the council were higher than we would have expected, having regard to the extent of the works and the level of building costs in the area. However, following the council's reapplications for two of these properties, containing additional information about unusual works, we were able to issue decisions on 5 April, approving higher figures. If the council wishes to reapply, with further information, for the other 15 properties we shall consider each case again carefully on its merits.

We are currently consulting on proposed revisions to the national expenditure limits for all designated types.

Caravan Sites

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to repeal the legislation making it the duty of local authorities to provide caravan sites for gipsies.

Mrs. Roe: No. My right hon. Friend informed the House, in a written reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) on 6 February last year,—*Official Report*, Vol. 109, columns *856-58*—that a review had been completed and that there was to be no amendment of the present law.

Stud Farms (Rates)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to revert stud farms and other facilities for the breeding and keeping of horses to their former status of not being liable for rates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The decision of the House of Lords in the case of Hemens (VO) v. Whitsbury Farm and Stud Ltd. has confirmed that the breeding of horses is not an agricultural activity for the purposes of rating. We are now considering representations that the law should be changed so as to extend the benefits of agricultural derating to stud farms.

Mobile Homes

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether planning permission is required *(a)* to site a mobile home in a private garden and *(b)* to connect a mobile home sited in a private garden to the main drainage; and if he will list the regulations which apply to such cases.

Mrs. Roe: It is for local planning authorities to decide in each case whether a development or use of land requires planning permission. Siting a mobile home in a private garden of a dwellinghouse is not development as defined in section 22 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 and so would not require planning permission provided the use of the mobile home was confined to a purpose incidental to the enjoyment of the dwellinghouse. Connecting a mobile home sited on a private garden to mains drainage would not require planning permission, but making such a connection, particularly if associated with providing other mains services, may indicate use for purposes not incidental to the enjoyment of the dwellinghouse.

Ozone Layer

Mr. Wigley To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received concerning Government action to protect the ozone layer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: In the first three months of 1988 the Department received approximately 300 letters about the ozone layer, either directly from members of the public or forwarded by right hon. and hon. Members.

Conservation

Mr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met his counterparts from the other European Community states; and what issues relating to co-ordinated measures to protect the environment were discussed.

Mr. Moynihan: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) on 24 March, at column *186*.

Council House Sales

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the reason for the delay in the purchase by Mr. John Kellers of his home at 16 Gylcote Close, Denmark Hill, SE5 8EU; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Roe: According to Southwark council, shortage of staff and high volume of work.

Rating Reform

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will explain the calculations behind the statement in "Paying for Local Government, Questions and Answers", published in December 1987, that businesses in the north and the midlands stand to be better off by £700 million every year as a result of the introduction of the national non-domestic rate and revaluation; and if he will provide comparable figures for each standard region in England.

Mr. Ridley: The figure is based on exemplifications of the effect if a uniform national non-domestic rate had been in force in 1987-88. That would have produced a gain to the north and midlands of £490 million. The best forecasts available of the likely effects of a concurrent non-domestic revaluation suggest a further reduction in business rates in the north and midlands in excess of £200 million. Estimates of the effect of the revaluation in 1990 disaggregated for different areas and classes of property are not yet available.

TRANSPORT

British Railways (Luffenham) Level Crossing Order

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from Rutland district council regarding the British Railways (Luffenham) Level Crossing Order; what reply he has sent; and on how many occasions in the last five years he or his predecessors have *(a)* confirmed such orders and *(b)* withdrawn them, following a critical submission from the local authority covering the area in question.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have received no representations to date from Rutland district council regarding the British Railways (Luffenham) Level Crossing Order. The British Railways Board circulated the draft order on 2 February and the period within which representations may be made ended on 2 April.

A total of 751 statutory orders have been issued in the last five years authorising changes in the protection arrangements at level crossings. The precise number of orders that have been rejected is not readily available but it is not thought that there have been more than six such cases.

Fishing Vessels (Radio Batteries)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to ensure an adequate supply of batteries for radios on fishing vessels using 2182 kilocycles for marine distress frequencies, in the light of the requirements of the Safety at Sea Act.

Mr. David Mitchell: When a major supplier withdrew from the market, the Department initiated the approval of an alternative supply of batteries for the portable radio equipment operating on 2182 KHz required to be carried on fishing vessels. In addition where owners are experiencing problems with the supply of batteries for such equipment, the Department is prepared to grant exemptions from the requirements for annual replacement in appropriate circumstances as a temporary measure.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the number of British-registered fishing vessels using 2182 kilocycle marine dishes frequency radios; and if he will list in the *Official Report* those companies which manufacture batteries for such radios.

Mr. David Mitchell: All United Kingdom fishing vessels of 17m in length and above (approximately 1,100) are required to carry portable radio equipment operating on 2182 KHz. Crompton Parkinson Ltd. manufacture the specialised batteries required for the available type-approved equipment.

Fishing Vessels (Approval)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list in the *Official Report* how many British-registered fishing vessels have sought approval under the Safety at Sea Act; how many have not met requirements; and for what reasons.

Mr. David Mitchell: Detailed requirements to implement the life-saving equipment provisions for fishing vessels in the Safety at Sea Act 1986 have now been introduced by the Fishing Vessels (Life-Saving Appliances) Regulations 1988. The requirement to carry lifejackets on smaller fishing vessels came into force on 15 February 1988. Those relating to the carriage of emergency position indicating radio beacons and automatic release of liferafts will be phased in from 15 April 1988 to 15 January 1989. The Act does not require specific approval of fishing vessels.

Crewe Bus Station

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received any guarantees from Carlton PSV Ltd. or the National Bus Company, concerning the maintenance of the Crewe bus station following Carlton PSV's purchase of Crosville Motors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: No. The hon. Lady will know from the answers given on 1 February that it has not been the National Bus Company's policy to seek to prevent rationalisation or replacement of particular assets.

Higham and Strood Tunnels (Flooding)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what evidence he has on the connection between the recent flooding in the Higham and Strood tunnels and the concreting over of nearby drainage channels.

Mr. David Mitchell: I am advised that British Railways has no knowledge of any concreting over of drainage channels and that it is unlikely that any such action without its knowledge would have significantly contributed to the recent flooding at Higham and Strood tunnels. The flooding occurred at the end of January this

year after a period of unusually prolonged and heavy rainfall, which caused a rise in the level of the local water table, up to the level of the bottom of the electric conductor rail, causing the suspension of electric-hauled services. Additional pumping combined with a general lowering of the local water table enabled normal services to be resumed on 23 February. However, high water table levels persist and pumping is continuing.

Clotton Bypass

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has for constructing a bypass round Clotton on the A51.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: None. We are currently considering whether there is a case for including a Clotton bypass as a candidate for future addition to our forward programme.

Coastguards (Equipment)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider granting a consultation period to interested parties before withdrawing the 41mm pistol and rockets and light line and floating head attachments from the coastguards and beach rescue services; what is he annual cost of maintenance for this equipment for the last five years; and how often this equipment has been used in the last five years to effect a rescue or to place a light line aboard a small craft.

Mr. David Mitchell: This is an operational matter and not one on which wider consultation is appropriate. The equipment, which is obsolete, is being withdrawn as from 31 March.

The floating head attachments were withdrawn from use in 1979. They caused an imbalance in the rocket projectile leading to an erratic and dangerous trajectory. The total cost of maintaining the line throwing equipment over the last five years was £170,143.

Using the present statistical system it is not possible to determine how many times the equipment was used to effect a rescue or place a light line aboard a small craft.

North Review

Sir Antony Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish the report of the North review; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department and I have today published the report of the road traffic law review which has been carried out under the chairmanship of Dr. Peter North, the Principal of Jesus College, Oxford. Dr. North's terms of reference asked him to examine ways of making the law simpler, more effective and more acceptable. The Government are grateful for the wide range of constructive proposals which the report contains and welcome its concentration on ways to reduce the number of accidents and the casualties, damage and misery which they cause. The many organisations consulted during the review will wish to study its recommendations in their final form. Meanwhile, we shall press on with our own consideration of the report, and will report to the House on our progress before the summer recess.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

Aircraft Safety

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will obtain a definitive statement from the Civil Aviation Authority of the time scale for *(a)* equipping all newly constructed aircraft used by British carriers with water-based fire-suppression systems and *(b)* the completion on a retro-fit basis of existing aircraft used by British carriers with water-based fire-suppression systems;

(2) if he will obtain an estimate from the Civil Aviation Authority of the cost of retro-fitting B747 aircraft with a water-based fire-suppression system; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if the Civil Aviation Authority will ensure that the case for providing passengers in British-registered aircraft with protection from toxic fumes and gases together with irritant smoke in aviation fire-related accidents will not be influenced or delayed by the desire to gain international agreement on this subject; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if he will ascertain from the Civil Aviation Authority why the authority's "Smokehoods: Net Safety Benefit Analysis" gives credit for floor-level lighting in circumstances of heavy irritant smoke, in the light of research undertaken by the Federal Aviation Authority purporting to show its ineffectiveness in such situations.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I have drawn the hon. Member's questions to the attention of the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority and I have asked the chairman to write to him.

Drivers (Licence Requirements)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether, in relation to the EEC directive on drivers' licence requirements, any exemptions or dispensations will be made in requirements for volunteers driving community service vans with more than eight seats.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: At present drivers of these vehicles need to have an ordinary driving licence. The licence requirements in the new system will not be known until the second EC Directive on driver licensing is published. The rights of existing licence holders to drive minibuses should not be affected by the new arrangements.

The responses to the Department's consultation paper on proposals to bring the driver licensing system into line with the EC licence category system have clearly indicated that tighter controls on new minibus drivers would cause serious problems for voluntary and community service operations.

We shall be pressing the EC to preserve the existing arrangements for these vehicles in the negotiations on the forthcoming directive.

Crossbush, West Sussex

Mr. Michael Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when was the last official visit by a Minister in his Department to Crossbush in West Sussex; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: During my visit to West Sussex on 2 March this year, I had a useful meeting in Crossbush village with my hon. Friend and the chairman of Lyminster parish council. I shall make an announcement as soon as I can on the possibility of building the Crossbush section of the Arundel bypass in advance.

SOCIAL SERVICES

NHS Building Programme

6. **Mr. Hayward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many hospital building schemes costed at more than £1 million were completed in 1974 to 1979; and how many have been completed since 1979.

15. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many building schemes costed at more than £1 million were completed in 1974 to 1979; and how many have been completed since 1979.

Mr. Newton: Information held centrally on health building schemes, each costing over £1 million, shows that 120 schemes were completed between April 1974 and March 1979 and 300 more have been completed from April 1979 to date.

25. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the National Health Service capital expenditure projects, costing more than £1 million, which have been completed in the Staffordshire, Moorlands parliamentary constituency during the past 14 years and those projected in the next five years.

Mrs. Currie: The information is as follows:

Completed Schemes:

New Cheadle Geriatric Unit—completed July 1987—cost £5 million.

Projected Schemes:

Leek Moorlands Hospital redevelopment—estimated completion date 1989—cost £2·079 million.

31. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the progress of the Health Service building programme.

37. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the progress of the Health Service building programme.

Mrs. Currie: The largest ever building programme in the history of the National Health Service is still under way. Information held centrally shows that there are currently over 500 health building schemes, each costing over £1 million, at various stages of planning, design and construction. The total value of the programme is estimated at over £3·5 billion, and the total capital expenditure this year (1988-89) is expected to exceed £1 billion.

These building schemes, which are located throughout the country, are providing a better health care environment for National Health Service patients and more attractive working conditions for staff. They are helping to improve productivity and value for money. Newer designs have been generally very well received by patients and the public and are being completed on time and to budget.

36. **Mr. Hanley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many capital schemes in the Health Service are under construction; and how many have been completed since 1979.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) earlier today.

Psychiatric Patients

7. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people are currently patients in psychiatric institutions compared with each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: Since 1981 there has been a welcome reduction of nearly 20 per cent. (to just over 60,000) in the number of in-patients in mental illness hospitals. The figures are as follows:

Table 1
Resident mental illness in-patients[1] by estimated duration of stay

England

Year	*All durations*	*Less than 1 year*	*per cent.*	*1 year-5 years*	*per cent.*	*More than 5 years*	*per cent.*
1981	73,170	27,150	37	17,190	23	28,830	39
1982	70,880	26,740	38	17,130	24	27,010	38
1983	69,030	26,350	38	17,060	25	25,620	37
1984	66,050	26,380	40	15,870	24	23,800	36
1985	63,970	27,400	43	14,950	23	21,620	34
1986	60,280	25,790	43	14,780	25	19,710	33

All columns are expressed as a percentage of total resident in-patients. Percentages may not add up to 100 per cent. because of rounding.

The reducing numbers of in-patients with duration of stay exceeding five years have been divided between:

	Discharges	*Deaths*
1981	818	2,657
1982	733	2,551
1983	821	2,417
1984	981	2,397
1985	986	2,346
1986	1,082	2,194

[1] Excludes patients in the four special hospitals.

Table 2
Mental illness services—other than in-patient provision

	England	
	1981	*1986*
Day hospital places	15,300	18,660
Day centre places[1]	7,600	9,220
Local authority, private and voluntary residential accommodation[2]	6,040	8,270
Community psychiatric nurses (whole-time equivalents)	1,080	2,530

[1] Including an estimate of places in mixed centres.

[2] The great majority of mentally ill people in the community live in ordinary family homes. Others have their home in

accommodation (including group homes) provided by eg housing associations and local authority housing departments. These figures are not identified in central statistics.

Benefits (Proof of Need)

11. **Sir Brandon Rhys Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his latest estimate of the number of claimants and their dependants who are eligible for benefits payable on proof of need; what proportion are currently in receipt of benefit; and if he will take steps to reduce the number of people obliged to depend on benefit payable on proof of need.

Mr. Portillo: The latest available estimates suggest that around 7·5 million to 8 million claimants are likely to be in receipt of income-related benefits following the introduction of the new structure, but a corresponding figure for dependants is not available. Falling unemployment, rising earnings, higher pensioner incomes from savings and occupational schemes and tax reductions will all tend to reduce the numbers who need to turn to such help.

Disabled People (Assistance)

17. **Ms. Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services by what criteria applications for assistance from the special fund to help the severely disabled are to be judged; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I announced the eligibility criteria for the independent living fund in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) on 31 March. The fund will be primarily to make payments to very severely disabled people on low income who receive attendance allowance and need to employ domestic help to enable them to live independently in the community.

18. **Mrs. Golding:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether there will be any mechanism for the review of or appeal against a refusal of assistance from the special fund set up to help the severely disabled.

Mr. Scott: It will be for the trustees of the independent living fund to determine how to deal with cases which have been turned down by the fund. I am sure that they will wish to give very careful consideration to any cases which give rise to dissatisfaction.

32. **Mr. McLeish:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects the special fund set up to help the severely disabled to be in operation; and if he will make a statement.

41. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects the special fund set up to help the severely disabled to be in operation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Members to my reply to the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Mackay) earlier today.

39. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether there will be any mechanism for the review of or appeal against a refusal of assistance from the special fund set up to help the severely disabled.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Members for Derbyshire North-East (Mr. Barnes) and Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) earlier today.

Community Care

20. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received following the publication of the report "Community Care: Agenda for Action", and if he will make a statement.

27. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received about the implications for Government policy of the Griffiths report on community care; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We have received a number of comments on Sir Roy Griffiths' report and will take account of them in framing our own proposals.

45. **Mr. Alfred Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to be able to make a definite statement on the Government's response to the recommendation of the Griffiths report.

Mr. Newton: Sir Roy Griffiths' recommendations raise issues of far-reaching significance which need careful consideration. We intend to bring forward our own proposals as soon as possible.

Social Security Reform

21. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claimants he expects to be better off *(a)* in cash terms, and *(b)* in terms of their real disposable income, following on the changes in social security in April.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's reply to the hon. Members for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) earlier today.

23. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether, in view of the inclusion of loans within the new social security system, he will make it his policy to help to expand independent debt counselling and advice services by providing financial support in addition to that currently provided by the Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Portillo: Money advice for supplementary benefit recipients who have serious financial difficulties has been provided in this Department by special case officers for several years. Social fund officers have been trained to undertake these duties in future.

42. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received about the number of families with children who will gain financially, and the numbers who will be unaffected, following implementation of social security reforms.

Mr. Scott: Many commentators have noted favourably that 90 per cent. of all families with children in receipt of benefit will gain or experience no change in cash terms.

Firemen

26. **Mrs. Beckett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how the transitional protection arrangements will operate in the case of part-time firemen transferring from supplementary benefit to income support on 11 April; and how their benefit entitlement will be affected by any subsequent fluctuations in their earnings.

43. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how the transitional protection arrangements will operate in the case of part-time firemen transferring from supplementary benefit to income support on 11 April; and how their benefit entitlement will be affected by any subsequent fluctuations in their earnings.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how the transitional protection arrangements will operate in the case of part-time firemen transferring from supplementary benefit to income support on 11 April; and how their benefit entitlement will be affected by any subsequent fluctuation in their earnings.

Mr. Scott: Part-time firemen working fewer than 24 hours a week will receive transitional protection at the point of change if their benefit income under income support is lower than that under supplementary benefit. This includes protection against a reduction in entitlement arising from the change in the disregard of earnings. For those entitled to income support and a transitional addition, the amount of the addition will not be affected by fluctuating earnings. Those receiving only a transitional addition will have that addition reduced by any increase in income.

Social Fund

22. **Mrs. Wise:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received regarding the allocations to his Department's offices to cover social fund payments during 1988-89; and if he will review these allocations.

28. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received regarding the allocations to his Department's offices to cover social fund payments during 1988-89; and if he will review these allocations.

30. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received regarding the allocations to his Department's offices to cover social fund payments during 1988-89; and if he will review these allocations.

Mr. Portillo: We have received letters from about 45 hon. Members and from about 10 members of the public. In addition, about 25 local offices have raised operational questions relating to their budget allocation. Allocations will be reviewed only in exceptional circumstances; for example, if a boundary change between offices occurs, or if there is a sudden unforeseen and unforeseeable call on a local office's budgets arising, for example, from a local disaster or emergency such as a flood.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will define the term "poor risk" in connection with his Department's local offices refusing loans under the new social security arrangements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The term "poor risk" is not one which is used in the directions and guidance issued to social fund officers to enable them to decide applications for loans made to the social fund. The directions and guidance issued for this purpose are contained in parts 3 and 4 of the "Social Fund Manual", a copy of which is in the Library.

Child Benefit

24. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if any decision has yet been taken about the future uprating of child benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The level of child benefit is reviewed each year as part of the annual review of benefits.

Hospitals (Nucleus System)

29. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the use being made of the nucleus system of hospital design.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) earlier today.

38. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many hospitals have been built to the nucleus design since its inception.

Mrs. Currie: So far 43 hospital building schemes, each costing over £1 million, have been completed using the nucleus standard design and briefing system; a further 22 nucleus schemes are under construction. We estimate that a total of at least £30 million has been saved by the use of this standardised approach in comparison with the conventional construction.

1991 Census

33. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how widely he has consulted on arrangements for the 1991 census.

40. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how widely he has consulted on arrangements for the 1991 census.

Mrs. Edwina Currie: The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys is formally consulting Government Departments, local authorities and health authorities. The consultation process is described in "Census Newsletter No. 2", a copy of which is in the Library. Additionally, the Registrar General has written to a number of other organisations, inviting views. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 2 November 1987, at column *573*, that a census is to be taken in 1991 he stated that submissions to the Registrar General from any source would be welcome.

Hospital Waiting Lists

34. **Mrs. Rosie Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to promote the flow of up-to-date information on waiting times for each speciality between health authorities by means of a computer network; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We have no present plans to set up a national computerised database of waiting times for hospital treatment. However, as part of the waiting list initiative we are encouraging health authorities to provide general practitioners with regularly updated information about waiting times in their own and neighbouring districts. Some authorities are using computer systems for this purpose.

Births, Marriages and Deaths (Registration)

35. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services to what extent the unit cost of registration of births, marriages and deaths has changed, in real terms *(a)* since 1979 and *(b)* since the efficiency scrutiny in 1985.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services to what extent the unit cost of registration of births, marriages and deaths has changed in real terms *(a)* since 1979 and *(b)* since the efficiency scrutiny in 1985.

Mrs. Currie: Firm local figures are available to 1985-86, current figures will be available later this year. From 1979-80 to 1985-86 the aggregate unit cost of registering births, civil marriages and deaths rose in real terms by 4·2 per cent. when compared against the retail prices index. This was, however, significantly less than the average salary increase of those administering the local registration service over the same period.

Health and Personal Social Services

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide an updated version of table 3.16 from "Health and Personal Social Services Statistics 1987", giving data for 1986 and 1987 whenever possible.

Mr. Newton: The information for September 1986 is shown in the table. Similar information for September 1987 is not yet available.

Nursing and Midwifery staff
Analysis by Area of work and Grade
in England at 30 September 1986

		Whole-time equivalents
All Nursing and midwifery[1]	*Total*	397,240
Administrative nursing		2,340
Nursing staff in centrally based services		1,775
Blood Transfusion Service		1,151
Administrative midwifery		179
Hospital nursing:	*Total*	330,830
Qualified:	*Total*	182,319
Senior Nurse 1-5		440
Senior Nurse 6-8		5,458
Tutorial nursing		4,935
Other registered nurses		104,613
Enrolled nurses		66,875
Learners:	*Total*	62,524
Post-registration student nurses		2,169
Post-enrolment student nurses		1,648
Pre-registration student nurses		48,350
Pupil nurses		10,358
Unqualified[2]	*Total*	85,987
Other nursing staff		85,981
Nursing cadets		6
Hospital midwifery:	*Total*	18,722
Qualified:		14,543
Senior Nurses 1-5		28
Senior Nurses 6-8		579
Tutorial midwifery		534
Other state certified midwives		13,403
Learners: Student midwives		4,179
Primary health care nursing:	*Total*	38,116
Senior nurse 1-5 and above		91
Senior nurse 6-8		1,254
Health visiting		
Health visitors[3]		10,393
Other registered		460
Other enrolled		93
Student health visitors		832
Other nursing staff		224
District nursing		
District nurses[4]		9,119
District nursing tutorial		43
Other registered		1,315
Other enrolled[5]		4,296
Student district nurses		680
Other nursing staff		3,203
School nursing service		
Registered nurses[6]		2,485
Enrolled nurses		182
Dual/triple duty posts:		
Health visitor/district nurse/midwife (and health visitor/midwife)		37
District nurse/Midwife (and SRN/midwife)		457
Enrolled nurse/Midwife		—
Other registered nurses		1,207
Other enrolled nurses		368
Other unqualified staff		1,378
Community health midwifery:		
Senior nurses 1-5 and above		—
Senior nurses 6-8		117
Other midwifery staff		4,011
Agency nurses (Hospital)[7]		4,866
Agency midwives (Hospital)[7]		268
Agency nurses (PHC)[7]		282
Agency midwives (PHC)[7]		35

Source: DHSS Annual Census of NHS non-medical manpower.
[1] Excludes agency staff.
[2] Includes nursing auxiliaries and nursery nurses.
[3] Includes Health Visitor Fieldwork Teachers, HV School Nurses, TB visitors with HV certificates and Bank HVs.
[4] Includes District Nurse Practical Work Teachers and Bank District Nurses.
[5] Includes enrolled nurses with District Nurse Training.
[6] Includes School nurses and other registered nurses working in the school health services and Bank School Nurses.
[7] Not included in the totals.

NHS Staff

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list *(a)* total staff in Great Britain, full-time and part-time, for the National Health Service, *(b)* the number of occupied beds, *(c)* the waiting lists and *(d)* the ratio of staff to occupied beds for the years 1960, 1982 and 1987.

Mr. Newton: The available figures for England are given in the tables. Staffing figures for 1960 are not available on a basis consistent with those for later years.

Staff in the National Health Service cover a wide range of Health Service activities, not simply those related to hospital beds. Moreover, staff-in-post figures are a "snapshot" relating to a particular day (the main census being on 30 September), whereas numbers of occupied

beds are based on a daily count averaged over a full calendar year. For those reasons any ratios of staff-in-post to occupied beds would be meaningless and have not, therefore, been provided.

Over the period in question, the number of in-patient cases treated rose by over 63 per cent. from 3,931,938 in 1960 to 6,413,789 in 1987. Data on day cases are not available for 1960 but between 1982 and 1987 the number of day cases treated rose by over 48 per cent. from 706,495 to 1,050,158.

The figures for the rest of Great Britain are matters for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Numbers of staff directly employed[1] by the National Health Service at 30 September: England
Numbers and whole-time equivalent[2]

	Whole-time number	*Part-time WTE[3]*	*Total WTE[3,4]*
1982	619,500	211,000	830,600
1986	595,500	206,000	801,600

Sources: DHSS annual censuses of National Health Service medical and non-medical manpower.

[1] Includes nursing and midwifery agency staff and medical and dental locum staff.
[2] Figures are independently rounded to the nearest one hundred (100).
[3] Includes honorary medical and dental staff.
[4] Community Health Service locums, for whom a breakdown by nature of contract is not available, are included in the totals.

Average number of beds occupied and number of patients on the National Health Service waiting list for England at 31 December

	Average number of beds occupied	*Number of patients on the in-patient waiting list*
1960	387,229·0	437,988
1982	279,833·0	746,086
[1]1986	254,597·2	676,475

[1] Latest data available are for 1986.

Dr. Owen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list for each year since 1979 the total number, and the number per occupied bed, in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, of *(a)* all hospital staff, *(b)* hospital administrators and clerks, *(c)* nurses, *(d)* hospital doctors, *(e)* professional and technical workers and *(f)* ancillary staff.

Mr. Newton: Such information as is available for England is shown in the tables.

Staffing figures have been given *(a)* for all hospital and community staff and *(b)* for hospital nursing and midwifery staff and medical and dental staff. (These are the only two staff groups that can be split between those working in the community and in hospitals).

Individual staff groups with the NHS cover a wide range of health service activity, not just that related to hospital bed provision. Staff-in-post figures are a "snapshot" on a particular day (the census date being 30 September), whereas occupied beds are a daily count averaged over a full calendar year.

For these reasons, and taking account of the variations in case load and patient dependency, staff-in-post/occupied beds ratios are crude and not meaningful. Staff and occupied bed statistics are therefore shown in separate tables.

Figures for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Northern Ireland.

National Health Service directly employed hospital and community health service staff—selected main staff groups at 30 September

England	*Whole time equivalents[1]* *1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Nursing and Midwifery (including agency)[2]	358,400	370,100	391,800	397,100	397,100	397,500	401,200	402,700
Medical and Dental (including locums)[3]	39,000	40,200	41,000	41,500	42,300	42,300	43,000	43,200
Professional and Technical (excluding works)[4]	60,100	61,900	65,200	67,200	68,700	72,700	74,300	76,100
Administrative and Clerical	103,000	105,400	108,800	108,800	110,000	110,300	111,000	111,400
Ancillary[4]	171,900	172,000	172,200	170,500	166,200	152,200	139,400	124,300
Others[5]	42,900	44,200	45,400	45,500	45,100	44,300	44,000	43,900
Total Directly Employed (including agency and locums)	775,300	793,800	824,400	830,600	829,400	819,300	812,900	801,600

Source: DHSS Annual censuses of National Health Service medical and non-medical manpower.

[1] Figures are independently rounded to nearest one hundred (100) whole time equivalents.
[2] Not adjusted for the reduction in nurses' contractual hours—from 40 to 37·5 per week during 1980/81.
[3] Includes all permanent paid, honorary and locum staff.
[4] On 1 April 1984 Operating Department Assistants transferred from Ancillary to Professional and Technical Staff Group. Figures not adjusted to take account of change.
[5] Includes works, maintenance and ambulance staff.

National Health Service directly employed hospital staff at 30 September

England	*Whole time equivalents[1]* *1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Hospital Nursing and Midwifery[2]	319,300	330,200	347,700	351,900	350,500	350,200	352,500	354,700
Hospital Medical and Dental[3]	34,700	35,800	36,600	37,100	37,800	38,800	38,600	38,800

Source: DHSS (SR7) Annual censuses of NHS medical and non-medical manpower.
[1] Figures are independently rounded to the nearest one hundred (100) whole-time equivalents.
[2] Includes agency staff. Not adjusted for reducation in nurses' contractual hours during 1980/81 (from 40 to 37·5 hours per week). Includes permanent paid, honorary and locum staff.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on 15 December 1987, *Official Report*, columns *493-96*, why costs incurred in respect of clerical and secretarial support employed in departments at hospitals and unit levels are considered operational rather than administrative.

Mr. Newton: Administrative, clerical and secretarial staff at hospital and unit level are operational in that they are an essential part of the day-to-day delivery of patient care services. They would include medical secretaries, ward clerks, interpreters and sometimes care assistants, who provide direct support to clinical staff. Administrative staff employed at regional and district headquarters are mainly concerned with the co-ordination of services between hospitals, planning and policy matters, and the maintenance of centralised services such as finance, supplies, personnel, procurement and computing.

Eye Operations (Newcastle)

Mr. Ted Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average waiting time for patients awaiting eye operations in Newcastle-upon-Tyne; and what was the number five years ago.

Mr. Newton: The estimated median waiting interval between the time an in-patient was placed on the waiting list and admission to a National Health Service hospital in the Newcastle district health authority area for an eye operation was three weeks in 1980 and 12 weeks in 1985, the latest year for which information in this form is available. The number of eye patients treated in Newcastle over the same period rose from 3,608 in 1980 to 3,737 in 1985.

Urgent Cases

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimate he has of the cost of treating all non-urgent cases waiting for more than one year and all urgent cases waiting more than one month, so that no one was in either position by July.

Mr. Newton: It is not possible to make a reliable estimate of the cost of reducing waiting time in the way suggested. The cost would depend on a range of factors, including the types of treatment needed, the extent to which extra staff, beds, equipment, operating theatre sessions and other facilities would be required and the number of new patients who would join the list between now and July.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if all districts will reach the target of all urgent cases being admitted within one month and all non-urgent cases within one year by March.

Mr. Newton: Targets of this kind, set in 1975, would no longer be appropriate in relation to the waiting list statistics now being collected, since these do not maintain the distinction between urgent and non-urgent cases, which is widely recognised to be too subjective to give reliable figures. However, as part of the waiting list initiative, we are encouraging health authorities to draw up local statements of policy on achievable in and out-patient waiting times.

Waiting Lists (Eye Treatment)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if, pursuant to the answer, *Official Report*, 8 March, column *178*, he is yet in a position to announce the distribution of a further £30 million for reducing waiting lists; and what proportion is for reducing waiting lists for eye treatment.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) on 10 March at columns *341-42*. Regional health authorities are currently finalising their programmes to tackle waiting lists and times in 1988-89. They have so far put forward over 350 projects for funding from within their allocations from the £30 million waiting list fund; 44 of these are in the specialty of ophthalmology.

Benefit System

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what recent representations he has received regarding the changes in the benefit system.

Mr. Scott: Many.

Training Schemes

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether individuals with transitional protection of benefit will retain their transitional benefit if they take a place on the community programme and leave when the adult training scheme is introduced in September.

Mr. Scott: Earnings from work done on the community programme will reduce or remove transitional additions in the same way as any other earnings. People not in full-time work who remain entitled to income support and transitional protection while they are on the community programme will not lose the protection as a result of leaving the community programme and joining employment training.

Mental Patients

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many long-term mental patients he estimates there will be in each health authority in England and Wales in each of the next seven years.

Mrs. Currie: We have no centrally collected information on which to base estimates.

Leukaemia

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what evidence he has of connection between the electromagnetic field attending high voltage transmission lines and the occurrence of leukaemia.

Mrs. Currie: There have been a number of studies published over the years on the possible health effects of exposure to the electro-magnetic fields produced from

high voltage power lines. Although some studies have indicated the possibility of a small increased risk of leukaemia, these studies have been limited and far from conclusive, and others have failed to find such evidence.

I am aware that the authors of one recent study done in the United States of America reported a possible association of magnetic fields with incidence of leukaemia and certain childhood cancers but that they did not regard their results as conclusive and recommended further study.

Further studies are under way or planned, including an independent survey of childhood cancer cases in England and Wales using new techniques for measuring magnetic fields in homes. The United Kingdom electricity supply industry expects to spend in the order of £1 million on supporting research in this area in 1988. The Department will continue to keep the evidence under review.

"Charities Digest"

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many copies of the "Charities Digest" his Department has purchased for distribution.

Mr. Portillo: A total of 1,100 copies of the "Charities Digest" were purchased in December 1987 and two copies distributed to each local office of the Department.

National Childbirth Trust

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to be able to announce the Department's response to the grant application of the National Childbirth Trust.

Mrs. Currie: We expect to respond shortly.

Regional Health Authorities (Civil Defence)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list what financial allocations for civil defence planning have been made to each of the regional health authorities in England and Wales for each of the last five years.

Mrs. Currie: Allocations to regional health authorities in 1981-82 included £38,000 provided to meet the costs of creating posts with responsibility for home defence planning and co-ordination. Since 1982-83 this funding has been built into authorities' baseline cash limits and has not been allocated separately.

Information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Poverty Trap

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received about the Government's measures, implemented in April, to help eliminate the poverty trap.

Mr. Scott: We have received numerous representations welcoming our measures to end the worst aspect of the poverty trap.

Women's National Cancer Control Campaign

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the women's national cancer control campaign to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mrs. Currie: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 13 June to 17 June.

City Hospital, Nottingham

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what saving has been made by the closure of a geriatric ward in the City hospital, Nottingham; and what further saving is anticipated from continued closure.

Mrs. Currie: Responsibility for the management of local health services rests with the district health authority (in this case Nottingham). I suggest the hon. Member contacts the chairman of that authority for the information he seeks.

Consultants

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will provide for 1986-87, or the latest figures available, a breakdown of the reasons for the absence of consultants from National Health Service hospitals with regard to *(a)* study leave, *(b)* holidays, *(c)* sick leave and *(d)* other;

(2) what is the latest cost of providing locums for National Health Service consultants; how much of this is to cover the cost of study leave; and if he will provide comparable figures for previous years.

Mr. Newton: I regret that this information is not collected centrally.

Drugs and Therapies (Licences)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the policy of his Department and appropriate committees on the granting of licences or provisional licences for drugs and therapies when full licences have already been granted by well-recognised national organisations, such as the United States Food and Drugs Authority; what priority the Committee on Safety of Medicines gives to consideration of such drugs and therapies when there are no known alternative cures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Under the Medicines Act 1968 and EC directives the United Kingdom licensing authority must be satisfied as to the safety, quality and efficacy of a medicinal product for human use before granting a product licence. In making a decision, the licensing authority must consider for itself the evidence which the directives require the applicant to submit, and also takes account of other relevant information which may include licensing decisions by other national regulatory agencies.

Licence applications are normally assessed in strict chronological order of receipt. Exceptionally, a product licence application may be fast-tracked when there are compelling reasons for believing that the product would provide a major therapeutic breakthrough in the treatment of patients for indicated conditions. "Fast tracking" means that the application is considered out of turn; it does not mean that normal standards are lowered.

Hospital Beds

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the current number of National Health

Service beds per 1,000 of the population; and if he will give comparable figures for previous years at 10-yearly intervals, including the earliest year available.

Mrs. Currie: The available information is given in the table.

National Health Service hospital beds per thousand population, England

Year	Average daily available beds	[2]Population (thousands)	Beds per thousand population
1949	[1]428,314	40,529·2	10·57
1956	[1]450,240	42,059·5	10·70
1966	434,846	45,264·5	9·61
1976	383,132	46,659·9	8·21
1986	315,714	47,254·5	6·68

[1] Estimate.
[2] Mid year population estimates.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide the latest figures available on the number of National Health Service hospital beds per 1,000 of the population in the United Kingdom and in other European countries.

Mrs. Currie: The table gives the available information published by the OECD in 1985. It does not, however, distinguish between private and state provision of hospital beds.

Table 27
In-patient medical care beds per 1,000 population, 1980s
(Actual year in brackets)

Country	1980s
Austria	10·8 (1983)
Belgium	9·5 (1982)
Denmark	7·4 (1983)
Finland	15·5 (1982)
France	11·6 (1983)
Germany	11·1 (1982)
Greece	6·2 (1981)
Iceland	11·1 (1982)
Ireland	9·7 (1980)
Italy	7·7 (1983)
Luxembourg	13·0 (1983)
Netherlands	12·0 (1983)
Norway	6·5 (1983)
Portugal	5·1 (1982)
Spain	5·4 (1981)
Sweden	14·0 (1983)
Switzerland	11·5 (1982)
Turkey	2·1 (1982)
United Kingdom	8·1 (1981)

Note: Data for Ireland in this table include long-term hospitals.
Source: Measuring Health Care 1960-1983, OECD, Paris, 1985, Table D.4.

Griffiths Report

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps his Department has taken to initiate a formal policy of consultation on the Griffiths report.

Mr. Newton: We are not undertaking a formal process of consultation, but have indicated our intention to take account of any views put to us by interested groups or organisations as part of our consideration of Sir Roy Griffiths' recommendations.

Europe Against Cancer Campaign

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has discussed the Europe against cancer campaign with the European Commission; and what response he has had to proposals he has made.

Mrs. Currie: The European Commission's proposed plan of action for Europe against cancer was discussed by the Council of Health Ministers in May 1987, and progress will be reviewed at the next Council of Health Ministers in May 1988. Discussion of a number of detailed aspects has continued with officials of the Commission, whose responses have generally been constructive.

Tobacco Products

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is his policy towards the proposals made by the European Commission to harmonise the regulation of all tobacco products in the EEC;

(2) if he proposes to take any action on the regulation of tobacco products in the light of the opinion of the European Parliament of 11 February.

Mrs. Currie: Current action by the EC regarding the regulation of tobacco products arises from the Commission's Europe against cancer proposals, which have been endorsed by the European Parliament. The United Kingdom is participating in a working group considering two draft directives concerned with harmonising the labelling of tobacco products and reducing the tar yields of cigarettes.

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what consideration was given to the definition of tobacco products adopted by the European Commission and European Parliament in deciding to ban Skoal Bandits.

Mrs. Currie: The Government were aware of a number of definitions of tobacco products, including those by the European Commission and European Parliament when proposals were made to make safety regulations under the Consumer Protection Act 1987 in respect of certain oral tobacco products.

Cancer Prevention

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will modify his policy on cancer prevention to take account of the European Commission's recent conclusion on the contributory role of diet, alcohol and tobacco in causing cancer.

Mrs. Currie: Recommendations on smoking, alcohol and diet in the European code against cancer are entirely consistent with our own preventive strategies. The European code, together with information on cancer prevention, will be widely publicised during European cancer week, 1-7 May 1988, and European cancer year in 1989.

AIDS

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has about the proportion of United Kingdom employers who have some employees with AIDS; and if he has any equivalent information about the United States of America.

Mr. Newton: The Government have no such information for United Kingdom employers. I am aware of the Alexander and Alexander Consulting Group 1987 AIDS survey on AIDS and employment undertaken in the United States of America, in which 17·8 per cent. of the 11,300 employers approached replied to a questionnaire; 10·1 per cent. of those employers indicated that they had, or had had, one or more employees with AIDS, 18·8 per cent. indicated that they had not and the remainder stated that they did not know.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he is now in a position to forecast the number of new cases of AIDS in 1989.

Mr. Newton: The Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre estimates that a total of 1,450 new cases of AIDS will be reported in 1988. A group of experts under the chairmanship of Sir David Cox is now considering the issues involved in forecasting numbers of cases for future years.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people, excluding haemophiliacs, have now been infected with the AIDS virus as a result of blood transfusions in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Newton: The latest statistics on cases of HIV infection, and AIDS, broken down by patient characteristic, were published on 11 April. Copies are in the Library.

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the latest figures for the probability of contracting the HIV virus and AIDS in the United Kingdom of the following groups *(a)* needle sharing drug abusers, *(b)* male homosexuals, *(c)* haemophiliacs and *(d)* heterosexuals having casual sexual contact.

Mr. Newton: It is not possible to assess the probability of people in the groups listed acquiring HIV infection in the United Kingdom, except in the case of haemophiliacs, for whom blood products are now made entirely from screened donations and are heat-treated to inactivate HIV. The figures on the latest numbers of reports of cases of AIDS and HIV infection were published on 11 April and copies are in the Library.

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what screening for AIDS is being carried out in order to ensure the future proper operation of the national organ donor programme.

Mr. Newton: On 2 March 1987 the Department's chief medical officer wrote to all doctors to remind them of the precautions needed to prevent the transmission of HIV through the transplant of infected tissue or organs. He made it clear that it was essential that blood from the donor is tested and found negative for HIV antibodies before the organ or tissue is transplanted and that inquiries should also be made to exclude donors most likely to have been exposed to the AIDS virus.

Mr. Bendall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to ensure that AIDS patients are not treated at the Royal Free hospital, Hampstead, in the same wards as haemophiliacs.

Mr. Newton: It is for individual health authorities to determine how best to provide in-patient care for those people with AIDS who require it, taking into account the guidance issued by the Department on control of infection procedures. My hon. Friend may wish to write to the chairman of Hampstead health authority, which is responsible for services at the Royal Free hospital, about the arrangements it is making.

Teaching Hospitals

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the teaching hospitals in England.

Mrs. Currie: The main university teaching hospitals of each of the 19 English medical schools are as follows. All the medical schools use, in addition, other NHS hospitals to meet their requirements for clinical facilities for undergraduate medical education. Such use is subject to change. Information about current usage can be obtained from individual medical schools.

Medical school	*Main university teaching hospital(s)*
Birmingham	Queen Elizabeth Hospital
Cambridge	Addenbrooke's Hospital
Leeds	The General Infirmary St. James' University Hospital
Leicester	Leicester Royal Infirmary
Liverpool	Liverpool Royal Infirmary
London	
Charing Cross and Westminster	Charing Cross Hospital Westminster Hospital
King's College	King's College Hospital
The London	The London Hospital, Whitechapel
The Royal Free	The Royal Free Hospital
St. Bartholomew's	St. Bartholomew's Hospital
St. George's	St. George's Hospital
United Medical Schools of Guy's/ St. Thomas	Guy's Hospital St. Thomas' Hospital
University College and Middlesex	University College Hospital The Middlsex Hospital
Manchester	Manchester Royal Infirmary Hope Hospital University Hospital of South Manchester
Newcastle Upon Tyne	The Royal Victoria Infirmary
Nottingham	The University Hospital, Nottingham
Oxford	The John Radcliffe Hospital
Sheffield	The Royal Hallamshire Hospital
Southampton	The Southampton General Hospital

Regional Health Authorities

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has recently received calling for the abolition of regional health authorities.

Mr. Newton: We have received a number of representations about the organisation of the NHS. We shall be considering these carefully alongside other proposals for reforms as part of the review of the NHS.

Mentally Handicapped People

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to his answer to the hon.

Member for Monklands, West of 15 March, *Official Report*, column *553*, what steps he takes to ensure that the provision of day care and adult training places is sufficient, in the absence of central information on the numbers of mentally handicapped people either leaving full-time education or being discharged from hospitals and needing such care.

Mrs. Currie: It is for local and health authorities to co-operate in the planning and provision of appropriate day services for mentally handicapped people in the light of their assessed needs and the authorities' knowledge of local requirements and resources.

Personal Social Services

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Monklands, West of 15 March, *Official Report*, columns *558-59*, if he will list those local authorities which did, and those which did not, experience real expenditure increases on the personal social services, as indicated by the national personal social services current expenditure revaluation factor, of 3·5 per cent. or more, and by how much, during 1987-88.

Mr. Newton: The information is given in the tables. Table 1 lists those local authorities whose budgeted personal social services expenditure for 1987-88 exceeded their estimated expenditure for 1986-87, uprated by the national personal social services current expenditure revaluation factor, by more than 3·5 per cent. and indicates the difference in cash terms. Table 2 lists those authorities whose expenditure increased by less than 3·5 per cent. on the same terms as table 1.

Table 1
Amount by which budgetted expenditure for 1987-88 exceeded 3·5 per cent. increase over 1986-87 estimated expenditure uprated for PSS pay and prices

Local authority	*£000s*
Barking and Dagenham	928
Barnet	774
Barnsley	463
Bedfordshire	325
Birmingham	1,159
Bolton	130
Buckinghamshire	419
Bury	149
Calderdale	713
Cambridgeshire	269
Cheshire	1,597
City of London	126
Cleveland	13
Cornwall	67
Croydon	1,250
Cumbria	1,167
Derbyshire	1,314
Doncaster	650
Dorset	843
Dudley	535
Durham	158
Ealing	2,198
Enfield	293
Gloucestershire	611
Hackney	8,684
Haringey	1,036
Havering	929
Hertfordshire	1,806
Hillingdon	1,590
Hounslow	617
Islington	5,313
Kirklees	17
Leeds	3,454
Leicestershire	1,079
Lewisham	1,414
Liverpool	1,156
Manchester	766
Merton	69
Newcastle upon Tyne	803
Newham	514
North Tyneside	1,117
Northamptonshire	75
Northumberland	227
Oxfordshire	888
Rochdale	268
Rotherham	281
Salford	325
Sandwell	1,784
Sefton	1,483
Shropshire	587
Solihull	133
Somerset	106
South Tyneside	619
Suffolk	1,519
Surrey	1,728
Sutton	396
Tameside	143
Tower Hamlets	233
Trafford	889
Wakefield	964
Walsall	718
Waltham Forest	3,230
Warwickshire	352
West Sussex	561
Wigan	210
Wiltshire	505
Wirral	2,624
Wolverhampton	1,051

Table 2
Amount by which budgetted expenditure for 1987-88 fell short of 3·5 per cent. increase over 1986-87 estimated expenditure uprated for PSS pay and prices.

Local authority	*£000s*
Avon	2,589
Berkshire	21
Bexley	156
Bradford	401
Brent	1,353
Bromley	642
Camden	2,104
Coventry	1,507
Devon	781
East Sussex	384
Essex	930
Gateshead	1,384
Greenwhich	1,937
Hammersmith and Fulham	624
Hampshire	182
Harrow	1,494
Hereford and Worcester	637
Humberside	201
Isle of Wight	75
Isles of Scilly	13
Kensington and Chelsea	91
Kent	1,428
Kingston upon Thames	124
Knowsley	456
Lambeth	8,109
Lancashire	498
Lincolnshire	868
Norfolk	1,599
North Yorkshire	126
Nottinghamshire	2,401
Oldham	155
Redbridge	372

Local authority	£000s
Richmond upon Thames	549
Sheffield	1,729
Southwark	4,586
St. Helens	714
Staffordshire	356
Stockport	406
Sunderland	54
Wandsworth	1,864
Westminster	1,971

HIV Screening

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will make it his policy to encourage the general public to come forward for HIV screening;

(2) if he will make it his policy to encourage all those who suspect they may be HIV-positive to come forward for HIV testing.

Mr. Newton: It is for individuals to decide whether to have an HIV antibody test in the light of their particular circumstances. Free and confidential counselling and testing are available through general practitioners and genito-urinary medicine clinics to everyone who wishes to have them.

Hospital Development Programmes

Sir Barney Hayhoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average time between the submission of plans for a major hospital redevelopment or development programme to his Department and Her Majesty's Treasury and their formal approval in part or whole, based upon the last 20 such cases.

Mrs. Currie: Departmental approval in principle is required for all schemes with works costs of over £5 million. Treasury approval is required for schemes in excess of £10 million and for those which start a cycle of development of over £25 million in total.

Each scheme needs to be considered on its merits. Fourteen of the 21 schemes given approval in principle in the last two financial years were cleared within 12 months. Seven of these were cleared within about six months. The longest took approximately 21 months. The time taken can be greatly affected by the quality of the initial submission, the complexity of the scheme and the issues raised. In most cases the process involves detailed discussion with the health authority and revisions to the submissions.

Hounslow and Spelthorne DHA

Sir Barney Hayhoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what assessment he has made of the effect on the hospital and community health services of the Hounslow and Spelthorne district health authority of the level of financial resources allocated for the financial year 1988-89.

Mrs. Currie: Allocations to district health authorities are the responsibility of the regional health authority. My right hon. Friend may wish to ask the chairman of the North West Thames regional health authority for his assessment.

Abortion

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to in how many cases an abortion performed at 18 weeks or more gestation has been on the grounds that a mother had been in contact with the AIDS virus or had contracted AIDS.

Mr. Newton: Of the notifications received for the period 1 January 1983 to 30 September 1987 (the 1987 data being provisional), there have been two at 18 completed weeks and over gestation where AIDS has been given as the principal medical condition on the notification form.

Technical Guides

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when the new social security technical guides will be available to the public.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will publish an income support and family credit handbook comparable with the supplementary benefit handbook.

Mr. Portillo: The technical guides dealing with the major reformed benefits, income support, social fund, family credit and housing benefit are available this week. Others will be produced shortly. These guides replace the existing priced handbooks on supplementary benefit and non-contributory benefits for disabled people, and are free of charge. They are primarily aimed at those who give professional advice to the public, such as citizens advice bureaux staff, but they will be available to members of the public who can obtain copies from social security offices.

Independent Living Fund

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he will lay before the House draft regulations providing for payments from the independent living fund to be disregarded in the calculation of entitlement to income support and other means-tested benefits.

Mr. Scott: Regulations will be laid as soon as possible after the fund is formally constituted.

Pathology Services

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what representations he has received following a recent London Weekend Television programme on the standards of testing by private sector pathology companies; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what representations he as received with regard to the General Medical Services Committee's position on accepting a pathology service which cannot be certain to produce accurate test results; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: No such representations have been received.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received and from what organisations, regarding any privatisation of the National Health Service pathology services, since 1 January; and if he will make a statement on his present policy towards privatisation of pathology services.

Mrs. Currie: Since 1 January the only representation received regarding privatisation of the NHS pathology services is that from the Royal College of Pathologists.

We have no plans for a central initiative involving privatisation of pathology services.

NHS Cleaning Contracts

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received regarding contracts awarded to the private sector for laundry and ward cleaning in National Health Service hospitals which have had to be cancelled as a result of inadequate performance; and if he will give the number of such contracts cancelled for each year since 1982.

Mrs. Currie: None; nine in total.

Unemployed Councillors

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his Department's practice with regard to asking an unemployed person who serves as a councillor whether he would be prepared to give up his duties as a local councillor in order to establish his availability for work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Unemployed people serving as councillors are subject to the same requirement as all other claimants who are required to be available for work in employed earner's employment as a condition for receiving unemployment benefits. They are expected to demonstrate that they are available for work in keeping with their skills but they are not required to give up their council duties in order to satisfy the availability condition. However, days on which they are engaged in approved council duties and which attract an attendance allowance are treated as days worked and the allowance is treated as earnings to be taken into account in determining entitlement to benefit.

Retirement Pensions

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the value in real terms of the basic retirement pension with effect from 11 April, taking November 1978 as the base and calculated according to the rise in average earnings since that date.

Mr. Scott: It will not be possible to compare the level of basic pension from April 1988 with that in November 1978 against the rise in average earnings over that period until earnings figures for April become available in mid-June.

Dental Charges

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the receipts from patient charges for treatment in the general dental service, in England, in each of the years 1979-87; what are the estimated receipts for 1987-88; and what is his estimate of receipts in 1988-89 and 1989-90, taking account of the changes in dental charges proposed in the White Paper on primary health care and of the likely movement in dentists' fees in those years.

Mr. Newton: Receipts from patient charges in the general dental service in England in the years 1979-80 to 1987-88 have been:

General dental service: England receipts from patient charges

	£ million
1979-80	70
1980-81	92
1981-82	115
1982-83	141
1983-84	155
1984-85	171
1985-86	196
1986-87	221
[1]1987-88	240

[1] Estimated.

The Government's current expenditure plans for England which reflect the changes proposed in the White Paper on primary health care, show estimated receipts from dental charges of £285 million in 1988-89, which includes estimated income from the proposed introduction of dental examination charges together with an increased income of £15 million (out of £17 million for Great Britain as a whole) from dental treatment charges compared with what was assumed for that year in the previous public expenditure White Paper. For 1989-90 the expenditure plans for England show estimated receipts of £334 million.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is his estimate of receipts from patient charges in England in 1988-89 and 1989-90, based on the system of charges introduced in April 1985, with a ceiling charge of £115 maintained, and taking account of the likely movement in dentists' fees in those years;

(2) what percentage charge rate, applied to all currently charged treatment and maintaining all current exemptions, would raise the receipts expected in 1988-89 and 1989-90 under the April 1985 charge system; and what would be the effect on that percentage charge rate of *(a)* raising the ceiling charge to £150, *(b)* maintaining the ceiling charge at £115 and extending charges to dental examinations and *(c)* raising the ceiling charge to £150 and introducing an examination charge.

Mr. Newton: Had no changes of any kind been made, for example to take account of inflation, to maintain receipts as a proportion of the gross costs of the general dental service, to move to proportionate charging for treatment currently charged at 100 per cent. or for items whose cost is currently fixed, or to introduce charges for dental examinations, receipts from patient charges would probably have been about £250 million in 1988-89 and about £260 million in 1989-90. To raise this amount, the following are estimates of the percentage charge rate which would be required, on the assumption that the charges illustrated and had been brought into effect from 1 April 1988:

	1988-89	*1989-90*
(a) with present maximum of £115	68	65
(b) with maximum of £150	66	62
(c) with present maximum of £115 and with a charge for dental examination	61	56
(d) with maximum of £150 and a charge for dental examination	60	53

NHS Charges (Income Generation)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the income for (i) pharmacists, (ii) dentists and (iii) opticians from National Health Service charges for each year from 1978-79.

Mr. Newton: The income from prescription charges collected by pharmacists and from patients' charges for general ophthalmic services for each year from 1978-79 is given in the table. There have been no charges to patients under the general ophthalmic service since National Health Service spectacles were discontinued from 1 July 1986.

For the income received from dental charges paid by patients in recent years I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) today.

Year	*Income from prescription charges England £million*	*Income from ophthalmic charges England £million*
1978-79	23·2	25·5
1979-80	36·9	27·6
1980-81	67·6	28·9
1981-82	82·7	32·3
1982-83	97·9	28·1
1983-84	104·7	43·8
1984-85	114·8	44·1
1985-86	120·7	11·8
1986-87	140·2	0·8

Social Security Offices (Birmingham)

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether all supplementary benefit payments were converted to income support at the social security offices at Kingsbury road and St. Margaret's road in Birmingham by 11 April.

Mr. Portillo: I can confirm that both local offices completed the conversion of supplementary benefit payments to income support by 11 April.

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claims for single payments were outstanding at the social security offices at Kingsbury road and St. Margaret's road in Birmingham on 31 March and 11 April.

Mr. Portillo: The offices at Kingsbury road (Erdington ILO) and St. Margaret's road (Washwood Heath ILO) had single payments outstanding as at 31 March 1988, and 11 April 1988 as shown in the following table:

Number of Single Payments Outstanding

Office	*31 March 1988*	*11 April 1988*
Kingsbury Road	1,113	1,029
St. Margaret's Road	1,056	1,251

NHS (Injury Costs)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the estimated annual cost to the National Health Service of treating injuries arising in shops, offices, factories, railways, roads, mines and quarries affecting employees covered by those activities; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The cost to the National Health Service of treating injuries which arise from accidents at work is not separately recorded and cannot be estimated.

Nurses (Mortgages)

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to his reply of 15 December 1987, *Official Report*, columns *495-6*, what arrangements have been made to monitor the take up of the low cost 100 per cent. mortgage scheme being run by the Nationwide building society for nurses; and how many applications have been received from *(a)* single buyers, *(b)* dual buyers and *(c)* multiple buyers.

Mr. Newton: The recently launched low-cost mortgage scheme involves direct arrangements between Nationwide Anglia and individual members of NHS staff. The Department keeps in touch with the building society over the broad state of developments, but does not monitor the details of numbers of applications. It is for the society to decide when and in what manner to publicise these. The society's last public statement quoted in the *Health Service Journal* on 7 April, reported that there had been 3,000 expressions of interest in the scheme and of those about 300 applications had been made.

Heating Addition

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many supplementary benefit claimants received the estate rate heating addition *(a)* at the lower rate and *(b)* at the higher rate in each year since 1984.

Mr. Portillo: The information requested is not available for all of the years requested. Figures from the annual statistical inquiry for 1984 and 1986 are as follows. There was no statistical inquiry in 1985 and the 1987 figures are not yet available.

Estate rate heating additions

Numbers 000s

	December 1984	*February 1986*
Lower rate	39	51
Higher rate	10	13

Performance-related Additions (Yorkshire)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services which district and unit general managers within health districts in the Yorkshire region received performance-related additions to their basic salaries in 1987-88; and if he will indicate the basis on which these payments were made.

Mr. Newton: The criteria for awarding performance-related pay to general managers were set out in a memorandum (PM (86)11) issued by the Department to health authorities in 1986. The scheme is designed to reward both short-term achievements and a sustained long-term contribution to the management of the authority. The payments made to individual managers are confidential between them and their employing authority.

Staff (Assaults)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) when he expects his Department's committee on violence against social services staff to publish its report; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will issue guidance to local authorities regarding the collation of statistics concerning assaults on social services staff; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what guidance he has issued to local authorities regarding measures to improve the working environments of social services staff in an effort to reduce the number of assaults to which such staff are subject;

(4) what guidance he has issued to local authorities concerning the training of social services staff in dealing with potentially violent situations; and if he will make a statement;

(5) if he has issued any guidance to local authorities on the provision of adequate insurance cover for social services staff who may be subjected to assault during the course of their duties; and if he will make a statement;

(6) what guidelines he has issued to local authorities regarding the provision of appropriate counselling and support to social services staff who have been subject to assault; and if he will make a statement;

(7) if he will make additional resources available to local authorities to enable them to take steps to reduce the number of assaults upon social services staff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The Department's advisory committee on violence to staff which is looking at staff in the health services and social security as well as in the personal social services is expected to report soon to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The issues that it has been looking at include monitoring incidents, staff training, environmental conditions, staff support and counselling. In 1987 the Association of Directors of Social Services published "Guidelines and Recommendations to Employers on Violence Against Employees", which give local authorities advice on the same issues plus insurance cover. The British Association of Social Workers has also published "Social Workers at Risk: The Prevention and Management of Violence" (1986) and is currently drawing up further guidance. Regarding resources each year, as part of the process of consultation leading to the rate support grant settlement, local and central Government officials discuss pressures on the social services in the PSS expenditure group. The problem of violence to social services staff has been among the subjects discussed in recent years. It is expected that this subject will again be covered in this year's expenditure group discussions which will lead to the 1989-90 rate support grant settlement, but I cannot at this stage anticipate the outcome of these discussions.

Old-age Pensioners (Kidney Dialysis)

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if an old-age pensioner receiving kidney dialysis will be financially worse off when the social security changes come into force in April; and if he will list the payments which will be made under the new scheme.

Mr. Scott: Pensioners whose benefit entitlement on the introduction of the income support scheme would be less than their existing supplementary benefit entitlement will have their total benefit income maintained in cash terms. This protection will be enhanced by an average amount for those who will have to pay a 20 per cent. contribution towards the general domestic rate.

The payments for which a pensioner receiving kidney dialysis under the income support scheme may qualify are as follows:

The personal allowance—

£33·40 for a single person, or
£51·45 for a couple;

The severe disability premium—

£24·75 for a single person, or
£49·50 for a couple where both members qualify;

The pensioner premium—

£10·65 for a single person, or
£16·25 for a couple;

The higher pensioner premium—

£13·05 for a single person or
£18·60 for a couple.

Pensioners

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if pensioners who receive benefit on Thursday or Friday will receive one payment at the old rate on 7 April and 51 payments at the new rate, following the increase in the state retirement pension in the week commencing 11 April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Payments of retirement pension in the week commencing Monday 6 April will be at 1987-88 rates, whether the pay day is Monday, Thursday or Friday. Pensions will be paid at 1988-89 rates during the 52 benefit weeks from the week commencing Monday 11 April 1988 to that commencing Monday 6 April 1989, inclusive.

Nuclear Installations (Cancer)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list data on the incidences of cancer among *(a)* workers in the nuclear industry and *(b)* citizens residing in the locality of nuclear plants; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The incidence of disease among specific groups of workers is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

In respect of persons residing in the vicinity of nuclear installations, a report entitled "Cancer Incidence and Mortality in the vicinity of nuclear installations, England and Wales 1959-80, (HMSO 1987)" was presented by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys in the series "Studies on Medical and Population Subjects", (No. 51). The report was published on 27 March 1987; copies were placed in the Library.

Nurses (Recruitment)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether there are any plans for a television advertising campaign to recruit nurses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We are currently revising our strategy for national recruitment publicity for nursing; the use of television is being considered.

Cervical Cancer Screening

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services in which health authorities the implementation of call and recall cervical cancer screening has been delayed by concern about *(a)* the capacity of pathology laboratories to cope with the additional smears and *(b)* surgical capacity to deal with the cases which need treatment.

Mrs. Currie: We are not aware of any.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services with which district health authorities he has had discussions about the adequacy of the Exeter software used in the computerised call and recall cervical cancer screening programme; and what was the outcome of the discussions.

Mrs. Currie: The computer software for cervical cancer screening call and recall systems has been discussed with a number of users of that software, including district health authorities. Account is taken of those discussions as additions and amendments to the software are made.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list those district health authorities who did not start to implement a computerised call and recall cervical cancer screening programme by 31 March; and if he will give the reasons for the delays.

Mrs. Currie: In my reply to the hon. Member on 10 March at column *344* I stated that after 31 March we would publish a full list of district health authorities which had implemented computerised call and recall systems for cervical cancer screening. This information is being provided by health authorities and we shall publish a list when the information has been collected.

Generic Medicines

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether interested parties will be able to submit evidence to the study into the market for generic medicines in Britain to be carried out by Touche Ross management consultants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Yes. The consultants are making their own inquiries, but, in addition, anybody who has information which they think is relevant may write either directly to the consultants or to the Department, which will pass on any such correspondence to them.

Homoeopathic Medicine

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will make a statement on his policy towards the use of homoeopathic medicine within the National Health Service; and what resources have been made available for *(a)* the current and *(b)* the forthcoming financial year to the regional health authorities for allocation to homoeopathic hospitals.

Mrs. Currie: Homoeopathic medicine is currently available within the National Health Service and this treatment will continue to be provided for as long as there are patients wishing to receive such treatment and doctors willing to provide it.

Information on the resources allocated to homoeopathic hospitals is not held centrally. Health authorities locally are responsible for determining priorities in all forms of care provided by the NHS and are in the best position to allocate resources accordingly.

Family Income Supplement

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table showing how many claimants of family income supplement pay rent only, rent and rates and rates only, broken down into two-parent and one-parent families at the latest date available.

Mr. Scott: Claimants for family income supplement are not required to provide details of their housing costs or tenure type, and information of the type requested cannot therefore be derived from data extracted from administrative records. However, it is possible to make some estimates from the family expenditure survey, although because of the small number of sample cases available it is necessary to combine several years' data. On the basis of the FES data for 1983-86 inclusive, 66 per cent. of family income supplement recipients appear to be tenants, 28 per cent. owner-occupiers and 6 per cent. non-householders. These proportions relate to two-parent and one-parent families combined, and if applied to the latest administrative information on family income supplement caseload (May 1986) would imply:

135,000 tenants
55,000 owner occupiers
15,000 non-householders.

For the two groups separately the proportion of tenants is very similar, but two-parent families contain a rather higher proportion of owner occupiers and one-parent families a rather higher proportion of non-householders.

Consultants

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give for 1987 the number of consultants on maximum part-time contracts who have merit awards, giving the number in each category: at, A, B and C.

Mr. Newton: The number of consultants in England and Wales on maximum part-time contracts with distinction awards in 1986, the latest date for which figures are available, is as follows:

Level of award	*Number*
A+	13
A	149
B	560
C	1,399
Total	2,121

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give for the National Health Service for the years 1979 and 1987 the number of consultants with full-time and maximum part-time contracts.

Mr. Newton: Figures for 1979 and 1986 are set out in the table. Comparable figures for 1987 are not yet available.

NHS Consultants (England): as at 30 September

	Full time contracts	*Maximum part-time contracts*
1979	5,057	3,261
1986	6,611	4,668

Pharmaceutical Products

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the increase, in cash and percentage terms, on intramural expenditure on research and development of pharmaceutical products in the United Kingdom in each year from 1983-84 to 1986-87.

Mr. Newton: Information on research and development expenditure by the British pharmaceutical industry is contained in the annual report 1986-87 of The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry at table 6 on page 35. A copy is in the Library.

Regional Secure Units

Mr. Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many places are *(a)* planned and *(b)* available in each regional secure unit;

(2) how many places in each regional secure unit are not currently available for patients; and if he will give reasons for any discrepancy between *(a)* planned places, *(b)* existing places and places currently occupied;

(3) if he will list those regional secure units for which there are waiting lists for places; for how many patients; how long they have been awaiting admission; and where they are currently accommodated.

Mrs. Currie: Thirteen of the 14 regional health authorities now have permanent regional secure units (RSUs) in operation. The remaining region, South West Thames, proposes RSU provision which will function in association with several "close supervision" units already operating in existing hospitals.

Details of permanent regional secure units in operation are shown in the table. Figures relating to staffed and available beds are based on latest available information.

Region and location	*Bed complement*	*Number of beds staffed and available*
1. *Northern*		
St. Luke's hospital, Middlesbrough	30	25
2. *Yorkshire*		
Fieldhead hospital, Wakefield	48	48
3. *Trent*		
Towers hospital, Leicester	45	30
4. *East Anglian*		
St. Andrew's hospital, Norwich	36	36
5. *North West Thames*		
Ealing hospital, [St. Bernards wing]	40	40
6. *North East Thames*		
Runwell hospital, near Southend	10	10
7. *South East Thames*		
Bethlem Royal hospital + linked units managed by Bexley, Bromley, Maidstone and Eastbourne Health Authorities	90	90
8. *Wessex*		
Knowle hospital, Fareham	31	22
9. *Oxford*		
Borocourt hospital, Reading	14	14
10. *South Western*		
Langdon hospital, Dawlish	30	30
11. *Mersey*		
Rainhill hospital, Prescot	50	50
12. *West Midlands*		
Rubery Hill hospital, Birmingham	100	46
13. *North Western*		
Prestwich hospital, Manchester (adolescent)	20	20
(adult)	88	44
	632	505

In addition to the details provided in the above table, the North East Thames region has plans to provide two further permanent RSUs, providing 62 beds, to complement the one already in operation at Runwell hospital; two further RSUs in the Oxford region, providing 26 beds, are due to be completed in 1988; and a second permanent RSU in the South Western region (30 beds) is also due to be completed at Glenside hospital, Bristol this year.

In most units, regions have decided to bring their bed provision into use on a phased basis as and when staff are recruited and resources permit.

We are awaiting the results of a research study which, together with other relevant evidence on secure facilities, will help us to take decisions on the eventual capacity and requirements of the regional secure unit programme.

Information on bed occupancy and waiting lists is not collected centrally.

Mental Nurses

Mr. Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the conclusions of the sub-group of the Standing Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Committee in its examination of the role of the registered mental nurse; and when he expects the committee to report.

Mr. Newton: The Standing Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Committee considered at its meeting on 5 April a draft report, prepared by a sub-group of its members, on issues arising in mental illness nursing in the light of developments in services for mentally ill people.

An amended report will be considered at the next meeting of the committee in July, when it is likely that members will also discuss the form and timing of any advice they wish to offer to Ministers, especially about wider consultation.

Community Psychiatric Nurses

Mr. Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the conclusions about the training of community psychiatric nurses of his predecessor's discussions with regional nursing officers; and what action he proposes to take.

Mr. Newton: Consultation with regional nursing officers has established that the number of mental illness nurses working in the community continues to increase as district-based services expand. There is an identifiable need to expand and develop education and training programmes to ensure an adequately qualified workforce to meet present needs and planned expansion.

Action taken includes discussion with the English national board which has already increased the number of

centres where appropriate training can be conducted. It has introduced and is evaluating the use of part-time and distance learning to improve access to courses.

Community psychiatric nursing staff have increased from 1,083 whole-time equivalents in September 1981 to 2,532 whole-time equivalents in September 1986.

Mentally Ill Patients

Mr. Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make it his policy, where health authority assessments of the local needs of chronic severely mentally ill patients discharged since 1955 from mental illness hospitals have not been made, as distinct from existing patients' needs, to withhold approval of further reductions in mental hospital beds and of plans for the closure of such hospitals until assessments of their needs have been made and alternative services to meet such needs provided.

Mrs. Currie: We anticipate that the comprehensive mental illness services being developed by district health authorities, in accordance with current policy, will reflect the total range of local needs, including the need for hospital in-patient care on a short or longer term basis as well as alternative forms of care.

Chronic Psychotic Illness

Mr. Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what opportunities for training and sheltered work are available for present and former patients suffering from a chronic psychotic illness in each health district *(a)* within psychiatric hospitals or units and *(b)* in the community.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that the information is not available centrally.

Industrial and Occupational Therapy

Mr. Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has on the plans of each district health authority affected to replace the industrial and occupational therapy provision in the psychiatric hospitals proposed for closure by 1995.

Mrs. Currie: Information on the plans of each health district is not routinely collected centrally but I would expect that, where appropriate, the replacement of any existing service would be part of the new services developed prior to the closure of a psychiatric hospital.

Elderly Patients (Crewe)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultation he has had regarding the proposals for development by the Crewe health authority of a private nursing home or private trust company to care for long-term elderly patients.

Mrs. Currie: None.

Funding and Medical Staff Employment (Trent)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the percentage change in *(a)* National Health Service funding in real terms and in cash terms and *(b)* employment of medical staff, from 1979 to 1988, in the Trent regional health authority.

Mr. Newton: The latest available information for the hospital and community health services in the Trent region is shown in the table.

	Cash	*Real terms*[2]	*Change*
Percentage change in net revenue expenditure 1979-80 to 1986-87[1]	103·4	21·9	—
Percentage change in whole time equivalent medical staff[3] 1979-1986	—	—	19·9

[1] Figures are based on health authorities' summarised income and expenditure accounts.
[2] Adjusted by the gross domestic product deflator.
[3] Includes permanent paid, honorary and locum staff.

Private Patients (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number of private patients using pay beds in the Nottingham district health authority on the latest available date, and what are the corresponding figures for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Currie: The information requested is given in the table.

Private patients using pay beds in the Nottingham District Health Authority 1979 to 1986

Year	*Average daily occupied beds*[2]	*In-patient cases treated*
1979	14·4	1,210
1980	15·5	1,359
1981	15·5	1,405
1982	14·9	1,400
1983	10·9	1,033
1984[1]	3·2	312
1985	3·7	285
1986	3·6	259

[1] The reduction results from the following:
(a) the closure of Nottingham general hospital pay bed wing during 1984.
(b) the withdrawal of authorisation from Nottingham eye hospital and Nottingham hospital for women.
[2] Excludes occupation of authorised pay beds by NHS patients.

Eye Tests and Dental Examinations (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many *(a)* eye tests and *(b)* dental examinations took place in the Nottingham health authority in each year since 1979.

Mr. Newton: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the eye tests which are carried out under the general ophthalmic service and the dental examinations carried out under the general dental service. These are the responsibility of the family practitioner committee. The following table gives the relevant available figures for Nottinghamshire family practitioner committee which includes the area covered by Nottingham health authority.

Nottinghamshire FPC

Year	*Number of eye tests*[1]	*Number of dental examinations*
1979	..	500,900
1980	..	538,660
1981	..	570,690

Year	Number of eye tests[1]	Number of dental examinations
1982	..	591,490
1983	180,578	591,810
1984	195,150	618,580
1985	199,724	635,560
1986	206,524	[2]652,660
1987	221,955	..

[1] Information is not readily available on eye tests before 1983.
[2] The Dental Estimates Board altered its presentation of statistics from a calendar year to financial year as from 1986-87 and this figure relates to the financial year.
.. = Not available.

General Practitioners (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has on the number of general practitioners in the area covered by the Nottingham district health authority in 1979 and the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will estimate the corresponding change in costs.

Mr. Newton: The information requested is collected from family practitioner committees which are not necessarily conterminous with health authority boundaries. The number of unrestricted general medical practitioners in the area covered by Nottingham family practitioner committee (which includes Nottingham DHA) has risen from 403 at 1 October 1979 to 464 as at 1 October 1986, the latest date for which figures are available. Information about the corresponding change in costs is not available centrally.

Supplementary Benefit Claimants (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the number of supplementary benefit claimants in each of his Department's offices covering the Nottingham, North constituency for each year since 1979.

Mr. Portillo: Nottingham, North constituency is served by the Department's local offices at David lane and Shakespeare street, although their boundaries are not conterminous.

The numbers of supplementary benefit claimants for the years requested are:

Date of count	Nottingham	
	David lane	Shakespeare street
27 November 1979	6,674	9,204
2 December 1980	7,721	9,915
9 December 1981	9,508	12,088
7 December 1982	10,604	13,731
6 December 1983	10,756	13,583
12 December 1984	11,694	14,956
11 December 1985	12,342	15,743
10 December 1986	12,962	16,279
17 November 1987	12,543	15,420

Source: 100 per cent. count of cases in action.

Staff (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the number of staff employed by each office of his Department in the Nottingham, North constituency for each year since 1979.

Mr. Portillo: The available information is in the table.

	Staff-in-post		
	1986	1987	1988
David lane	146	153·5	156
Shakespeare street	177·5	183·5	187·5

The numbers above were the staff employed on 1 April each year. I regret that the information for earlier years is not available.

Nottingham Health Authority

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the number of *(a)* physiotherapists, *(b)* speech therapists, *(c)* radiographers, *(d)* chiropodists, *(e)* occupational therapists, *(f)* dieticians and *(g)* laboratory technicians employed by the Nottingham health authority in each of the last five years.

Mrs. Currie: The figures are shown in the table.

National Health Service staff in post: 30 September
Nottingham District Health Authority
whole time equivalents[1]

	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Physiotherapists[2,3]	136	143	150	155	148
Speech Therapists[3]	51	45	36	40	40
Radiographers[3]	132	137	145	150	148
Chiropodists[3]	52	44	29	32	29
Occupational Therapists[3]	60	72	74	84	80
Dieticians	16	17	17	20	21
Medical Laboratory Scientific Officers	212	210	205	211	205

Source: DHSS Annual Census of NHS non-medical manpower.
[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest whole time equivalent.
[2] Includes Remedial Gymnasts.
[3] Excludes helpers.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the projected levels of funding for the next three years for the Nottingham district health authority, expressing year-on-year changes as a percentage in both cash and real terms.

Mrs. Currie: The Department issues resource assumptions and allocates funds to regional health authorities which then determine district health authority funding. In 1988-89 Trent RHA's revenue allocation was increased to £1,050 million; a 6·3 per cent. cash increase or 1·7 per cent. in real terms. The initial resource assumptions for 1989-90 show a further real terms increase of between 1·5 and 1·7 per cent.; a revised assumption for 1989-90 and an assumption for 1990-91 will be issued in due course. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Trent RHA for information on funding for Nottingham district health authority.

Examinations, Operations and Beds

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the current waiting lists for *(a)* examinations, *(b)* operations and *(c)* beds in each specialty in each hospital in the Nottingham health district.

Mr. Newton: The available information, for 31 December 1986, is given in the table. It should be noted that in certain specialties a clinician may maintain a waiting list which is common to more than one hospital within a district health authority.

In-patients waiting lists as at 31 December 1986, by hospital, Nottingham District Health Authority

Hospital and Specialty	*Waiting list*
Nottingham City	
General surgery	140
Traumatic and orthopaedics	290
Urology	77
Plastic surgery	1,160
Thoracic surgery	47
Gynaecology	658
Total	2,372
Nottingham General	
Oral surgery[1]	844
Total	844
University	
Dermatology	16
Neurology	22
Geriatrics	7
General surgery	811
Ear, Nose and Throat	1,491
Traumatic and orthopaedics	352
Ophthalmology	666
Urology	124
Neurosurgery	26
Gynaecology	355
Total	3,870
Saxondale	
Total	0
Highbury	
Total	0
St. Ann's	
Psychiatry children	1
Adolescent psychiatry	2
Total	3
Basford	
Total	0
St. Francis	
Psychogeriatric	11
Total	11
Mapperley	
Mental illness	22
Total	22
The Coppice	
Total	0

[1] Patients on the waiting list are treated at Nottingham City and University Hospitals.

Bed Occupancy (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the bed occupancy rates in each specialty in each hospital in the Nottingham district health authority in 1987.

Mrs. Currie: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad) on 24 March 1988 at column *211*.

Cardiac Unit (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all those who have made representations to him regarding a cardiac unit in Nottingham.

Mrs. Currie: We have received no such representations.

National Health Service (Leasing)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has on the use of leasing as a form of capital finance within the National Health Service.

Mrs. Currie: The National Health Service may employ leasing as a means of acquiring capital assets, but it should be used only where it represents best overall value for money to the Exchequer as a whole. Where leasing of capital assets is proposed the full costs of the leasing option must be shown to be lower than outright purchase, and the Department's and, in most cases, Treasury's approval is required. Leasing is not regarded as a form of additional capital finance for the National Health Service.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will seek powers to prevent community health councils from using public money for party political purposes.

Mr. Newton: Community health councils are established and funded by regional health authorities to represent the interests of the public in the Health Service. A community health council is independent both of the health authorities and the Department in the way in which it goes about its task. A community health council must, however, remain within the law and is accountable to the regional health authority for the way in which the funds have been used. If my hon. Friend has evidence of the misdirection of community health council funds to party political purposes I will arrange for it to be considered.

Housing Benefit Scheme

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will name the 45 local councils listed in his Department's housing benefit reform implementation progress report as not being ready to meet the deadline of 1 to 4 April for the implementation of the new housing benefit scheme;

(2) if he will name the local councils which indicated in their replies to his Department's survey, "Housing Benefit Reforms April 1988: Progress on Implementation — Progress Report Form A", that they expect problems and delays with their computer software;

(3) if he will name the local councils which indicated in their replies to his Department's survey, "Housing Benefit Reforms April 1988: Progress on Implementation — Progress Report Form A", that they expect problems and delays in training staff;

(4) if he will name the local councils which indicated in their reply to his Department's survey, "Housing Benefit Reforms April 1988: Progress on Implementation — Progress Report Form A", that they expect problems and delays in converting existing cases to the new housing benefit scheme;

(5) if he will place in the Library the detailed responses from each local council replying to his Department's survey, "Housing Benefit Reforms April 1988: Progress on Implementation".

Mr. Portillo: I have placed in the Library a summary of the responses received to the questionnaire issued to local authorities by the Department in January of this year. It is not our practice to publish correspondence with individual authorities.

Cigarettes and Tobacco (Regulation)

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he intends to follow the policy of the World Health Organisation on the regulation of cigarettes and tobacco.

Mrs. Currie: The World Health Organisation recommends that Governments should adopt a full range of policies on cigarette smoking and tobacco consumption. The Government have a comprehensive policy including restrictions on tobacco advertising and sponsorship, a ban on sales to children, controls on the composition of tobacco products and a programme on health education to make people aware of the dangers of smoking.

World Health Organisation

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services which conferences held by the World Health Organisation were attended by officials from his Department in 1986 and 1987; and how many officials attended in each case.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that this information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the annual contribution of the United Kingdom to the World Health Organisation since 1979.

Mrs. Currie: The United Kingdom's annual contributions to the World Health Organisation since 1979 were:

Year	*£*
1979	3,916,870·99
1980	4,487,613·48
1981	4,286,214·93
1982	5,548,167·23
1983	6,512,426·45
1984	7,484,053·40
1985	8,956,020·70
1986	7,730,188·60
1987	7,298,735·75

The contribution is assessed in US dollars and the variations reflect, in part, fluctuations in the exchange rate.

District Health Authorities

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the amount of money paid in rates or in lieu of rates by each district health authority in England for the financial year 1987-88.

Mr. Newton: Health authorities' annual accounts for 1987-88 are not due for submission to the Department until the end of June 1988. Information for that financial year will be available in the autumn.

Member's Correspondence

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to reply to correspondence sent to him by the hon. Member for Gower dated 21 January with regard to Mr. Harris and his cataract operation.

Mrs. Currie: I wrote to the hon. Member on 29 March.

Nurses

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many nurses are currently employed by health authorities in England; and how many are undertaking further training to improve the scope and standard of their skills.

Mr. Newton: There were 236,800 whole-time equivalent qualified nurses and midwives employed in the NHS in England at 30 September 1986.

Information supplied by the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting showed that about 10,000 qualified nurses and midwives entered some form of post-basic nurse training during the year ended 31 March 1987. Details are:

	Numbers
Midwifery, District Nursing and Health Visiting	4,830
Teachers training	1,180
Other Post basic training	3,880

In addition, an unknown number would have received further training organised by individual health authorities and in-service training.

Whitley Hospital, Coventry

Mr. John Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if following the decision to close the Coventry Whitley hospital, he will publish in the *Official Report* the letter from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) of 16 March 1988, to the Coventry district health authority about its duty to have regard to the particular circumstances of each elderly individual whose care provision will be transferred from the hospital consultants to the local housing association.

Mrs. Currie: The following is the text of the letter to the chairman of Coventry health authority.

"As you know we have been considering your proposals for the future pattern of services in Coventry and in particular the plans for the Whitley Hospital. We have weighed the arguments very carefully and have concluded that the proposals should proceed. We are satisfied that the proposals are in the best interests of patients and will allow more effective and efficient use to be made of health care resources in Coventry. In developing your plans for collaboration with the local housing association for the care of those elderly people not requiring consultant oversight in hospital, you will need to take into account the particular circumstances of each individual likely to be concerned.

In agreeing to these proposals I hope you will bear in mind our concern that patients should not be compelled to transfer from NHS beds to a fee-charging home unless they have indicated their willingness to do so with a clear understanding on their part of the arrangements by which such charges would be met. You will continue to provide for patients in NHS beds under consultant care, who will require continuing nursing care and who do not wish to transfer to the new facility on the Whitley Hospital site."

NHS Spending

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the present level of spending on the National Health Service; and what was the comparable figure in real terms in 1978-79.

Mr. Newton: The information is as follows:

£ Million (at 1987-88 prices)

	1978-79	*1987-88 (estimated outturn)*
Gross National Health Service expenditure (Great Britain)	15,687	20,789

Note:
Expenditure for 1978-79 has been revalued using the GDP deflator.

Patients (Physiotherapy)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his policy with regard to the treatment of NHS patients in need of physiotherapy continuing to be restricted to state registered physiotherapists.

Mr. Newton: We have no plans to change the current requirement of state registration as a prerequisite for the employment of physiotherapists within the NHS.

Blood Donors (North Staffordshire)

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) for each year since 1983, what was the number of blood donors in north Staffordshire and the amount of blood collected from them;

(2) how many people have been employed in the blood transfusion service in north Staffordshire in each year since 1983; and if he will make a statement;

(3) whether there are any delays in the collection of blood from donors in north Staffordshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: I regret we do not hold this information centrally. The hon. Member may therefore wish to write to the chairman of West Midlands regional health authority, which is responsible for the blood transfusion service in the west midlands, for advice on these issues.

Income Support

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide a breakdown of the extra expenditure on income support for families with children in 1988-89, broken down into expenditure incurred by transitional protection and expenditure not incurred by transitional protection; and, in each case, how much of this expenditure is attributable to compensation for the 20 per cent. rates contribution, on the same basis as his reply to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East on 7 March, *Official Report*, columns *56-7*.

Mr. Scott: Of the £150 million extra expenditure on income support for families with children in 1988-89, extra expenditure on transitional protection will be £20 million and that on structural changes £130 million.

Extra expenditure on income support for families with children in 1988-89 to compensate for the 20 per cent. rates contribution will be £80 million. This relates entirely to the structural effect. However, in calculating the amount of benefit payable at the point of change to income support, compensation for the rates contribution is also to be built into the supplementary benefit levels. But for this, the cost of transitional protection for families with children would have been reduced by £10 million and the total additional expenditure in 1988-89 reduced from £150 million to £140 million.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make it his policy to undertake to estimate the number of disabled claimants by constituency who will receive a lower entitlement under income support than they currently receive.

Mr. Scott: The effects of the reformed structure of income-related benefits on all the various client groups, including the disabled, will be monitored. It will not, however, be possible to provide information on an individual constituency basis.

Family Credit

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how much of the extra £220 million to be spent on family credit from April is attributable to the freeze in child benefit.

Mr. Scott: About £18 million.

Retirement Age

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he intends to bring forward proposals for retirement ages and pensions following the review he announced in answer to the hon. Member for Dorset North (Mr. Baker) on 25 February, *Official Report*, column 295.

Mr. Scott: We cannot at this stage predict when the work we are doing on considering options for change in pension age will yield results. In carrying forward this work, we must also have regard to the proposed EC directive completing the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in statutory and occupational social security schemes which is currently under discussion.

Sight Tests

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimates have been made of the reduction in numbers of people taking sight tests which will arise from the levying of charges.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 25 March 1988]:* It would not be practicable to attempt any such estimate, particularly in the absence of information about possible charges for sight tests conducted privately under the proposed arrangements. However, on the basis of experience with the more competitive market already introduced for spectacles, we would expect charges to be modest; and since some 30 per cent. of the population, including the least well-off, will continue to be entitled to a free NHS sight test, we see no reason to expect a significant reduction in demand.

Government Expenditure

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was Government spending on the

hospital and community health services per household as a proportion of the average household income in 1978-79, 1982-83 and 1986-87.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 25 February 1988]:* Gross expenditure on the hospital and community health services (United Kingdom) represented 4·5, 5 and 4·5 per cent. of average income per household in 1978-79, 1982-83 and 1986-87, respectively. However, as these figures are affected by changes in the number and composition of households, a more reliable indicator is expenditure per person which rose from £106 in 1978-78 to £198 in 1982-83 and to £249 in 1986-87.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 13 April 1988

TRANSPORT

Underground Trains

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trarsport (1) what discussions he has held with London Regional Transport about the introduction of rolling stock on the London Underground designed to reduce crime opportunities and increase passenger protection;

(2) what studies he has undertaken or commissioned into the design of underground train carriages so as to increase passenger protection against crime.

Mr. David Mitchell: My Department maintains close contact with London Underground Ltd. on measures to combat crime on the Underground. Features to improve passenger security have been incorporated in the prototype trains built to evaluate the replacement stock to serve the Central line in the 1990s. These include alarms which allow passengers to talk to the driver and greater visibility between carriages. The trains will undergo passenger service trials later this year.

Autoguide Electronic Route Guidance System

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress is being made with the Autoguide electronic roue guidance system.

Mr. Channon: I have today helped the private sector to launch its Autoguide demonstration scheme, which covers much of the Westminster area and the corridor to Heathrow airport. I have also issued a consultation document on the following stage on the project: the London pilot system. I have placed copies in the Library.

Both the demonstration scheme and the London pilot sysem are important steps towards a national commercial Autoguide service, which will make an important contribution towards keeping traffic moving and improving the quality of road travel.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Rehvot (Bombing Incident)

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what report he has received from Her Majesty's ambassador in Tel Aviv regarding the claim by the Palestine Liberation Organisation to have detonated bombs on 20 March in a bus shelter in Rehvot; and whether he will instruct the ambassador to convey the regrets of Her Majesty's Government to the Government of Israel about this terrorist incident.

Mr. Mellor: We have seen no report of such a claim.

Syria (Mr. Philip Habib)

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has raised through the British interests section in the Australian embassy in Damascus Her Majesty's Government's reaction to the refusal of the Syrian Government to receive President Reagan's envoy, Mr. Philip Habib; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: No.

Iraq (Peace Initiative)

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what report he has received from Her Majesty's ambassador in Baghdad regarding the public statement made there on 26 March by Mr. Yasir Arafat rejecting Mr. George Shultz's peace initiative; and whether Her Majesty's ambassador has made any representations to the Government of Iraq regarding this statement.

Mr. Mellor: The "Summary of World Broadcasts" edition of 29 March quotes Mr. Arafat as saying in Baghdad on 27 March:

"We are not against any peace initiative, but we are not ready to respond to any initiative that ignores the Palestinian people and their rights".

We have not raised this statement with the Government of Iraq.

ENVIRONMENT

Planning Appeals

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average period of time for holding an inquiry into a planning appeal, from the date of the original planning application to the local authority to the commencement of the inquiry.

Mrs. Roe: For the 1,922 planning appeals decided in 1987, following public inquiries, the median time from the date of the planning application to the start of the inquiry was 54 weeks. It must be borne in mind that an appeal can be lodged at any time up to six months after the local planning authority's decision, or after the date by which that decision should have been made.

Tenants' Choice Interviews (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if Nottingham city council was informed of the tenants' choice interviews conducted in Nottingham in the current week; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what contact and co-operation his Department had with Nottingham city council prior to the setting up of research interviews with tenants on the sale of estates.

Mrs. Roe: A small sample of tenants in Nottingham, from estates selected in consultation with the city council's director of housing, are taking part in group discussions to identify factors which are important in a choice of landlord. The project is not concerned with the sale of these estates or of any other particular estates.

Rushmoor Borough Council

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether Rushmoor borough council had a legal agreement, endorsed by his Department at the time of the transfer of the Greater London council housing stock, whereby subsidy will continue to be paid on the major technical repairs programme for the Prospect Estate at no cost to the borough.

Mrs. Roe: No.

Rating Reform

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what basis he will issue the capital allocation of £25 million for the preparation costs of the community charge which he announced on 24 March.

Mr. Howard: The £25 million capital allocations will be issued pro rata to adult population. Letters have been sent to each charging authority in England informing it of its individual allocation. A list of these allocations has been placed in the Library. Subject to parliamentary approval of the community charge legislation, the allocations will assist councils to begin preparing for the introduction of the community charge in 1990. Although authorities are unlikely to incur significant additional current expenditure in the financial year 1988-89, it is likely to be helpful for them to be able to begin preparations on capital projects such as the installation or adaptation of computer systems. These allocations show that the Government recognise the need for authorities to make an early start on these so that the collection of the community charge will run efficiently from the beginning. These early allocations will enable councils to plan sensibly for the operation of the new system, which will for the first time make them truly accountable to the people they serve.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those bodies that have made representations to his Department on the possible effects of the introduction of the poll tax on rural areas and on the services provided by local authorities.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* A summary of the 1,271 responses received by 31 October 1986, when the consultation period on the Green Paper ended, was placed in the Library on 15 December 1986. Since June 1987 my Department has received some 8,300 letters, the majority of which—about 6,100—are from private individuals. However, the letters contain a variety of comments on specific aspects of our proposals, or requests for further information, and for this reason do not readily lend themselves to an analysis of correspondents' views.

Rates

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the projected rate increases for all counties, boroughs and districts in England for the financial year 1988-89.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* The following is the available information for county precept increases and local rate increases in boroughs and districts in 1988-89:

Increases in local rates and county precepts 1988-89

	Per cent.
Avon	7·9
Bedfordshire	6·1
Berkshire	8·5
Buckinghamshire	9·2
Cambridgeshire	4·9
Cheshire	10·0
Cleveland	11·9
Cornwall	12·9
Cumbria	5·5
Derbyshire	13·5
Devon	11·3
Dorset	7·4
Durham	15·0
East Sussex	14·1
Essex	17·8
Gloucestershire	11·9
Hampshire	8·8
Hereford and Worcester	9·8
Hertfordshire	16·9
Humberside	20·3
Isle of Wight	9·7
Kent	12·5
Lancashire	18·5
Leicestershire	11·0
Lincolnshire	14·0
Norfolk	10·0
Northamptonshire	15·1
Northumberland	[1]14·6
North Yorkshire	11·9
Nottinghamshire	7·2
Oxfordshire	9·3
Shropshire	8·7
Somerset	11·7
Staffordshire	8·3
Suffolk	7·9
Surrey	10·5
Warwickshire	15·9
West Sussex	9·1
Wiltshire	7·8

[1] Excluding Northumbria police precept.

Increases in local rates and county precepts 1988-89

	Per cent.
Isles of Scilly	3·1
Greater Manchester	
Bolton	6·3
Bury	7·4
Manchester	−9·7
Oldham	10·1
Rochdale	7·4
Salford	8·6
Stockport	10·0
Tameside	7·9
Trafford	10·1
Wigan	9·5
Merseyside	
Knowsley	3·7
Liverpool	1·2
St. Helens	5·7
Sefton	7·4
Wirral	7·2
South Yorkshire	
Barnsley	8·9
Doncaster	8·3
Rotherham	7·6
Sheffield	12·1
Tyne and Wear	
Gateshead	10·0
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	−7·2
North Tyneside	9·0
South Tyneside	8·5
Sunderland	3·8
West Midlands	
Birmingham	3·2
Coventry	8·0
Dudley	1·9
Sandwell	5·0
Solihull	0·4

	Per cent.
Walsall	4·7
Wolverhampton	3·5
West Yorkshire	
Bradford	11·0
Calderdale	18·1
Kirklees	12·8
Leeds	8·0
Wakefield	12·2

Increases in local rates and county precepts 1988-89

	Percentage
City of London	4·1
Camden	−2·6
Greenwich	12·5
Hackney	9·3
Hammersmith and Fulham	5·2
Islington	13·6
Kensington and Chelsea	−26·4
Lambeth	−17·9
Lewisham	3·7
Southwark	−9·3
Tower Hamlets	11·6
Wandsworth	31·7
Westminster	−0·4
Barking and Dagenham	6·2
Barnet	15·6
Bexley	13·4
Brent	10·7
Bromley	7·3
Croydon	8·0
Ealing	−24·5
Enfield	20·5
Haringey	−9·9
Harrow	8·5
Havering	8·0
Hillingdon	7·4
Hounslow	7·3
Kingston-upon-Thames	10·5
Merton	10·8
Newham	11·6
Redbridge	0·5
Richmond-upon-Thames	10·7
Sutton	9·6
Waltham Forest	−31·3

Increases in local rates and county precepts 1988-89

	Per cent.
Avon	
Bath	0·0
Bristol	15·0
Kingswood	0·7
Northavon	9·5
Wansdyke	8·1
Woodspring	14·5
Bedfordshire	
North Bedfordshire	0·9
Luton	−3·6
Mid Bedfordshire	5·4
South Bedfordshire	12·5
Berkshire	
Bracknell	3·0
Newbury	11·4
Reading	21·7
Slough	0·2
Windsor & Maidenhead	0·2
Wokingham	29·4
Buckinghamshire	
Aylesbury Vale	1·6
South Bucks	21·4
Chiltern	7·3
Milton Keynes	3·9
Wycombe	3·0
Cambridgeshire	
Cambridge	27·0
East Cambridgeshire	−0·9
Fenland	11·1
Huntingdonshire	4·6
Peterborough	8·8
South Cambridgeshire	1·7
Cheshire	
Chester	5·9
Congleton	5·2
Crewe and Nantwich	10·3
Ellesmere & Neston	5·0
Halton	5·0
Macclesfield	4·7
Vale Royal	9·8
Warrington	10·8
Cleveland	
Hartlepool	11·1
Langbaurgh-on-Tees	11·7
Middlesbrough	−27·8
Stockton on Tees	23·2

Increases in local rates and county precepts 1988-89

	per cent.
Cornwall	
Caradon	21·8
Carrick	14·1
Kerrier	17·1
North Cornwall	12·5
Penwith	12·9
Restormel	5·1
Cumbria	
Allerdale	0·0
Barrow in Furness	16·5
Carlisle	0·3
Copeland	0·6
Eden	6·0
South Lakeland	0·7
Derbyshire	
Amber Valley	−8·6
Bolsover	9·7
Chesterfield	0·6
Derby	−5·7
Erewash	16·4
High Peak	6·2
North East Derbyshire	17·8
South Derbyshire	8·0
Derbyshire Dales	13·9
Devon	
East Devon	1·5
Exeter	7·8
North Devon	11·2
Plymouth	16·2
South Hams	7·8
Teignbridge	13·7
Mid Devon	13·6
Torbay	6·8
Torridge	1·0
West Devon	22·7
Dorset	
Bournemouth	0·0
Christchurch	7·6
North Dorset	24·7
Poole	5·6
Purbeck	6·8

	per cent.
West Dorset	15·7
Weymouth and Portland	0·0
East Dorset	18·6
Durham	
Chester le Street	7·3
Darlington	9·7
Derwentside	20·6
Durham	10·1
Easington	53·8
Sedgefield	9·5
Teesdale	9·7
Wear Valley	11·8

Increases in local rates and county precepts 1988-89

	Per cent.
East Sussex	
Brighton	33·3
Eastbourne	0·0
Hastings	4·8
Hove	from 0p to 4·9p
Lewes	6·7
Rother	2·8
Wealden	6·3
Essex	
Basildon	−6·0
Braintree	17·4
Brentwood	−5·0
Castle Point	5·6
Chelmsford	36·1
Colchester	14·9
Epping Forest	5·0
Harlow	6·3
Maldon	−6·0
Rochford	14·9
Southend on Sea	0·0
Tendring	0·5
Thurrock	17·5
Uttlesford	2·5
Gloucestershire	
Cheltenham	5·0
Cotswold	6·1
Forest of Dean	2·1
Gloucester	5·6
Stroud	20·7
Tewkesbury	1·7
Hampshire	
Basingstoke and Deane	18·8
East Hampshire	16·6
Eastleigh	5·8
Fareham	7·7
Gosport	9·3
Hart	12·2
Havant	21·7
New Forest	20·4
Portsmouth	3·4
Rushmoor	−3·8
Southampton	4·0
Test Valley	9·7
Winchester	7·3
Hereford and Worcester	
Bromsgrove	15·1
Hereford	−33·6
Leominster	9·4
Malvern Hills	5·3
Redditch	7·4
South Herefordshire	2·4
Worcester	4·1
Wychavon	6·6
Wyre Forest	13.6

Increases in local rates and county precepts 1988-89

	Per cent.
Hertfordshire	
Broxbourne	0·0
Dacorum	5·1
East Hertfordshire	13·1
Hertsmere	0·6
North Hertfordshire	21·3
St. Albans	39·4
Stevenage	0·0
Three Rivers	0·8
Watford	0·0
Welwyn Hatfield	7·1
Humberside	
Beverley	11·2
Boothferry	13·9
Cleethorpes	9·0
Glanford	0·6
Great Grimsby	11·5
Holderness	25·0
Kingston-upon-Hull	−17·0
East Yorkshire	24·4
Scunthorpe	5·9
Isle of Wight	
Medina	3·9
South Wight	4·3
Kent	—
Ashford	5·1
Canterbury	8·8
Dartford	1·1
Dover	26·0
Gillingham	42·3
Gravesham	5·8
Maidstone	1·4
Rochester on Medway	0·3
Sevenoaks	13·0
Shepway	33·0
Swale	5·2
Thanet	9·8
Tonbridge and Malling	10·8
Tunbridge Wells	20·3
Lancashire	
Blackburn	−4·1
Blackpool	6·9
Burnley	0·0
Chorley	5·0
Fylde	4·5
Hyndburn	1·7
Lancaster	8·0
Pendle	9·6
Preston	18·4
Ribble Valley	7·2
Rossendale	9·2
South Ribble	11·4
West Lancashire	0·2
Wyre	3·3

Increases in local rates and county precepts 1988-89

	Per cent.
Leicestershire	
Blaby	−4·3
Charnwood	−2·6
Harborough	5·5
Hinckley and Bosworth	15·7
Leicester	9·5
Melton	41·2
North West Leicester	6·3
Oadby and Wigston	4·9
Rutland	1·3

	Per cent.
Lincolnshire	
Boston	12·8
East Lindsey	18·3
Lincoln	14·8
North Kesteven	6·5
South Holland	6·7
South Kesteven	1·9
West Lindsey	7·1
Norfolk	
Breckland	16·5
Broadland	15·5
Great Yarmouth	3·9
North Norfolk	9·7
Norwich	4·1
South Norfolk	20·0
Kings Lynn/West Norfolk	9·0
Northamptonshire	
Corby	0·0
Daventry	0·0
East Northampton	24·1
Kettering	8·1
Northampton	15·8
South Northampton	16·4
Wellingborough	1·1
Northumberland	
Alnwick	22·3
Berwick-upon-Tweed	16·9
Blyth Valley	9·6
Castle Morpeth	15·0
Tynedale	8·0
Wansbeck	7·4
North Yorkshire	
Craven	10·5
Hambleton	20·7
Harrogate	6·8
Richmondshire	13·3
Ryedale	7·6
Scarborough	7·6
Selby	3·8
York	9·6

Increases in local rates and county precepts 1988-89

	Per cent.
Nottinghamshire	
Ashfield	8·8
Bassetlaw	8·9
Broxtowe	5·7
Gedling	13·0
Mansfield	16·1
Newark and Sherwood	23·5
Nottingham	0·0
Rushcliffe	1·3
Oxfordshire	
Cherwell	4·4
Oxford	88·2
South Oxfordshire	5·0
Vale of White Horse	2·4
West Oxfordshire	3·2
Shropshire	
Bridgnorth	5·6
North Shropshire	26·5
Oswestry	24·6
Shrewsbury and Atcham	9·3
South Shropshire	12·5
The Wrekin	15·2
Somerset	
Mendip	12·0
Sedgemoor	0·2
Taunton Deane	4·2
West Somerset	19·4
South Somerset	31·0
Staffordshire	
Cannock Chase	2·4
East Staffordshire	3·0
Lichfield	7·6
Newcastle under Lyme	5·5
South Staffordshire	6·9
Stafford	21·7
Staffs. Moorlands	22·6
Stoke-on-Trent	3·6
Tamworth	0·0
Suffolk	
Babergh	5·8
Forest Heath	17·5
Ipswich	9·8
Mid Suffolk	11·4
St. Edmundsbury	16·0
Suffolk Coastal	39·1
Waveney	7·8

Increases in local rates and county precepts 1988-89

	Percentage
Surrey	
Elmbridge	2·5
Epsom and Ewell	10·8
Guildford	0·0
Mole Valley	6·2
Reigate and Banstead	7·4
Runnymede	−14·6
Spelthorne	−72·9
Surrey Heath	10·5
Tandridge	4·5
Waverley	9·4
Woking	11·5
Warwickshire	
North Warwickshire	4·6
Nuneaton and Bedworth	8·4
Rugby	1·5
Stratford-on-Avon	−1·7
Warwick	7·4
West Sussex	
Adur	7·8
Arun	8·4
Chichester	7·0
Crawley	12·3
Horsham	9·0
Mid Sussex	17·6
Worthing	0·0
Wiltshire	
Kennet	7·4
North Wiltshire	25·9
Salisbury	13·9
Thamesdown	−7·4
West Wiltshire	41·4

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Grammar Schools

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many grammar schools are operated by local authorities; what was the figure for 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: The numbers of grammar schools maintained by local education authorities in England in January 1987 and in January 1979 were 152 and 254 respectively.

University Admissions (Ethnic Monitoring)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to meet the University Grants Committee to discuss proposals for ethnic monitoring in relation to admission proposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Further to my reply to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) on 29 February 1988, at columns 404-5, the Department issued on 8 March its consultative document addressing the issues and options for consideration in the collection of ethically based statistics for students in further and higher education. The University Grants Committee was included among the bodies in the university sector to which copies were sent. In addition, as adumbrated in my previous reply, the Department has raised the question of the ethnic monitoring of university applicants with the Universities Central Council on Admissions, which is now considering the proposal in consultation with other interested bodies.

Research Centres

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will seek additional funding for setting up interdisciplinary research centres in 1989-90.

Mr. Jackson: Funding in 1989-90 for inter-disciplinary research centres and for the science base generally will be subject to review in this year's public expenditure survey.

Reception Classes

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what measures he proposes to take to ensure that reception classes in primary schools are adequately staffed.

Mr. Dunn: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) on 15 March, at column 531.

Further Education

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received concerning his plans for further education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: 362 responses have been received to the consultation paper. "Maintained Further Education: Financing, Governance and Law", from a wide range of local education authorities, colleges, educational and other organisations, and individuals.

Horniman Museum

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he has for the future of the Horniman museum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: We are urgently considering the most appropriate arrangements for the Horniman museum and will make an announcement as soon as possible.

Child Guidance Service

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he is developing for the future of the Child Guidance Service within inner London, in the light of the proposed abolition of the Inner London education authority.

Mr. Dunn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) on 28 March, at column 273.

Supply Teachers

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what guidance his Department has given to local education authorities in Wales concerning the salary scales of supply teachers; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: It is for local education authorities to determine te pay of supply teachers within the framework set down in the "School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document 1987."

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Welsh Language

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Attorney-General whether there are any plans to initiate a review of the use of the Welsh language in courts in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Government are committed to the principle of equal validity in the use of English and Welsh in court proceedings in Wales as provided for in the Welsh Language Act 1967. The Lord Chancellor will willingly consider any specific representations about the facilities for the use of Welsh in courts for which he is responsible, but a further general review is considered to be unnecessary.

Welsh Social Security Commissioner

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Attorney-General what recent representations he has received concerning the Welsh Social Security Commissioner; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: Since the closure of the Cardiff office of the social security commissioners on 4 August 1986 my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has received written representations on that subject from nine Members of Parliament, one peer and two members of the public, to which replies were sent explaining the reason for the closure and the steps taken to ensure that hearings continue to take place in Cardiff as necessary.

DEFENCE

Morocco

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what restriction Her Majesty's Government impose on the

use of British military equipment and weapons supplied to the kingdom of Morocco to ensure that they are used neither for external aggression against the Saharawi people nor for internal repression.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on 14 July, at column 442.

Nuclear-powered Submarines

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many nuclear-powered submarines he expects to have been taken out of service by the year 2000; and what proposals he is considering for their decommissioning.

Mr. Sainsbury: On current plans 10 nuclear-powered submarines will have been taken out of service by the year 2000. Sea disposal of the entire submarine, land burial of the intact reactor compartment and piecemeal disposal of the reactor machinery in a deep disposal site to be developed by Nirex are options which are under consideration by the MOD but no decisions have yet been taken.

The safety and environmental implications of these options will, of course, form part of the Government's deliberations.

WALES

Inward Investment

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *26*, if he will give the corresponding figures for each year since 1979.

Mr. Peter Walker: The numbers of inward investment projects secured for Wales by county during the period 1 April 1983 to 31 December 1987 are shown in the following table. Figures for the years prior to the establishment of WINvest in April 1983 are not available.

Inward investment into Wales by county from 1 April 1983 to 31 December 1987

County	1983		1984		1985		1986		1987		Total	
	Project	Investment £ Millions	Project	Investment £ Millions	Project	Investment £ Millions	Project	Investment £ Millions	Project	Investment £ Millions	Project	Investment £ Millions
Clwyd	2	120·1	5	29·1	10	39·7	22	49·9	29	45·8	68	284·6
Dyfed	1	—	3	6·0	5	10·5	1	27·0	7	12·9	17	56·4
Gwent	6	3·0	18	51·8	15	22·8	23	38·8	17	69·6	79	186·1
Gwynedd	1	—	1	0·8	—	—	1	—	3	0·7	6	1·5
Mid Glamorgan	3	9·9	8	25·7	23	49·3	24	37·6	30	66·1	88	188·6
Powys	—	—	—	—	2	0·6	—	—	1	0·1	3	0·7
South Glamorgan	6	28·0	7	29·3	10	18·9	2	0·2	13	37·3	38	113·8
West Glamorgan	3	0·4	3	21·2	4	16·5	8	22·2	13	6·5	31	66·9
Total Wales	22	161·4	45	163·9	69	158·3	81	175·7	113	239·0	330	898·6

Note: Investment figures have been individually rounded and therefore may not equal totals.

Teaching Hospitals

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the teaching hospitals in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: Undergraduate medical and dental education is provided by the University of Wales college of medicine and the Cardiff Dental school on the site of the University Hospital of Wales. Clinical training is provided primarily at the University hospital of Wales, the Cardiff royal infirmary and Llandough hospital.

The postgraduate education of doctors continues through to the senior registrar grade and there are training posts in all the larger hospitals in Wales.

Green Pound

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to press for a devaluation of the green pound; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: The European Commission proposal not to make any changes in the green pound in the price package for 1988-89 will be subject to discussion at the forthcoming meetings of the Council of Ministers. We strongly support the Commission's aim of removing all MCAs by 1992 and we have already made clear our commitment to press for the immediate abolition of our MCAs in the pigmeat sector.

Regional Aid

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if his Department currently applies outside financial appraisals for straightforward regional development grant applications.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* No.

Morriston Hospital

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when his Department first received a request that Morriston hospital should be made a sub-regional centre for prenatal services; what progress has been made in considering the proposal; when he expects to make a decision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* The response of West Glamorgan health authority to consultation on the recommendations of the perinatal mortality initiative report relating to the establishment of a regional perinatal intensive care service were received in May 1987. Together with the responses of other health authorities in Wales it has been the subject of detailed study and an announcement of the Welsh Office proposals, in the light of consultation, will be made as soon as possible.

PRIME MINISTER

Council of Europe

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Prime Minister if she will announce the composition of the United Kingdom delegation for the 40th session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

The Prime Minister: The 40th Session Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe will be opened in Strasbourg on 2 May 1988. The delegation from the United Kingdom for the Session will consist of eleven Members of the Conservative party, six Members of the Labour party and one Member of the Social Liberal and Democratic party. I have also appointed a number of substitute delegates.

The appointments of representatives and substitutes have been made on the basis of nominations by the Leaders of those parties concerned.

The same delegation will be representing the United Kingdom Parliament at the Assembly of the Western European Union, which next meets in Paris on 6 June.

Representatives from the Government Benches will be:

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir Geoffrey Finsberg) — who will act as leader of both delegations.

The hon. Members for:

Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith)
Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) (Government Whip)
Twickenham (Mr. Jessel)
Northampton, South (Mr. Morris)
Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Stokes)
Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson)
Ashford (Mr. Speed)
Streatham (Mr. Shelton)
Medway (Dame P. Fenner)
The Earl of Kinnoull.

Representatives from the Labour Party will be:

The hon. Members for:

Neath (Mr. Coleman)
Wallsend (Mr. Garrett)
Wentworth (Mr. Hardy)
Tooting (Mr. Cox)
Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry)
Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing)

Representatives from the Social Liberal and Democratic Party will be:

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston).

The following substitutes have been appointed to act as necessary on behalf of the delegates.

From the Government Benches:

The hon. Members for:

Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson)
Eastwood (Mr. Stewart)
Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell)
Thanet, North (Mr. Gale)
Lewes (Mr. Rathbone)
Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden)
Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord)
Ravensbourne (Mr. Hunt)
Lord Newall and Lord Rodney

From the Labour Party:

The hon. Members for:

Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson)
Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland)
Don Valley (Mr. Redmond)
Warley, East (Mr. Faulds)
Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock)
Cunninghame, South (Mr. Lambie)
Lord Kirkhill

From the Social Liberal and Democratic Party:

The Lord Mackie of Benshie

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects the United Kingdom to ratify the convention establishing the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency.

Mr. Chris Patten: I am glad to announce that the United Kingdom's instrument of ratification of the MIGA convention was deposited by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the World Bank's offices in Washington on 12 April 1988. Sufficient ratifications have now been received for the convention to enter into force. The United Kingdom has therefore become an original member of the agency and will play a full part in its formative stages. MIGA, which will encourage private investments in developing countries, principally by issuing contracts of guarantee against defined non-commercial risks, is a welcome addition to the World Bank group and we hope it will have a long and successful life.

SCOTLAND

Labour Statistics

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current level of employment in *(a)* the coal industry in Scotland and *(b)* the electricity using industries in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: British Coal has about 5,000 employees in Scotland at present. In addition, roughly 1,000 people are employed on opencast and deep mining by subcontractors. There are also a small number working in licensed private mining.

There is no generally accepted definition of "the electricity using industries". Estimates of the numbers of employees in employment in Scotland in September 1987 by broad industry categories are given in table 1.5 of the March *Employment Gazette*, available in the Library of the House. A more detailed industry breakdown, from the 1984 census of employment, appears in an article in "Scottish Economic Bulletin" number 36, also available in the Library of the House.

Rate Support Grant

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing for each district council area in Scotland *(a)* the rate of support grant for 1987-88, *(b)* that figure expressed per capita of the population of the authority, *(c)* the rate support grant in 1978-79 in 1986 prices, *(d)* expressed as a sum per capita of the then population of the authority, and *(e)* the percentage difference between *(c)* and *(d)*.

Mr. Lang: The figures show for each local authority the total and per capita amounts of rate support grant paid in 1987-88, the total and per capita amounts of rate support grant paid in 1978-79 expressed in 1986-87 prices, and the percentage difference between the 1978-79 and 1987-88 per capita figures. The GDP deflator is used to convert the

figures for 1978-79 from cash to 1986-87 prices. The grant figures used for 1987-88 are based on the Rate Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1987. No adjustment has been made for grant penalties since they will be restored if authorities bring their expenditure down to guideline at outturn.

	(1) Total RSG 1987-88	(2) Total RSG per head 1987-88	(3) Total RSG 1978-79 in 1986-87 prices	(4) Total RSG per head 1978-79 in 1986-87 price	(5) Percentage change between column 2 and column 4
Regions					
Borders	39,903,204	391·96	37,585,671	374·04	5·0
Central	73,894,672	271·85	74,802,201	275·19	−1·0
Dumfries and Galloway	53,254,149	362·84	49,262,167	343·36	6·0
Fife	97,346,577	283·13	100,201,708	292·07	−3·0
Grampian	145,915,693	290·18	148,270,940	319·42	−9·0
Highland	89,287,275	444·74	90,335,804	479·17	−7·0
Lothian	188,261,970	253·75	228,644,362	304·73	−17·0
Strathclyde	868,415,907	370·39	900,064,841	368·08	1·0
Tayside	124,784,343	318·05	124,661,542	309·39	3·0
Islands					
Orkney	9,421,381	489·02	8,241,727	452·92	8·0
Shetland	11,139,709	472·42	11,887,137	554·18	−15·0
Western Isles	29,665,079	941·93	23,576,297	794·75	19·0
Districts					
Berwickshire	453,691	24·20	773,274	43·24	−44·0
Ettrick and Lauderdale	700,083	21·07	1,281,908	39·00	−46·0
Roxburgh	1,497,245	42·51	1,710,379	47·68	−11·0
Tweeddale	287,902	19·71	453,246	32·69	−40·0
Clackmannan	1,042,782	21·91	1,978,584	41·16	−47·0
Falkirk	1,650,467	11·54	3,226,336	22·38	−48·0
Stirling	933,493	11·50	2,458,923	30·89	−63·0
Annandale and Eskdale	840,120	23·39	1,212,824	34·57	−32·0
Nithsdale	996,694	17·38	1,623,543	28·87	−40·0
Stewartry	452,270	19·55	657,241	29·33	−33·0
Wigtown	706,293	23·25	1,010,377	33·96	−32·0
Dunfermline	1,485,223	11·50	4,412,015	34·53	−67·0
Kirkcaldy	1,953,516	13·18	4,965,083	33·19	−60·0
North East Fife	983,908	14·79	2,040,632	31·04	−52·0
Aberdeen City	4,180,520	19·33	6,230,813	29·87	−35·0
Banff and Buchan	958,713	11·53	3,013,947	38·32	−70·0
Gordon	1,967,205	27·79	3,565,627	62·31	−55·0
Kincardine and Deeside	738,280	15·44	1,414,273	36·99	−58·0
Moray	1,166,722	13·76	3,265,358	40·05	−66·0
Badenoch and Strathspey	120,125	11·33	249,434	26·03	−56·0
Caithness	1,122,787	41·38	1,286,147	46·25	−11·0
Inverness	676,472	11·13	1,576,523	28·46	−61·0
Lochaber	361,610	18·67	1,096,253	54·47	−66·0
Nairn	276,063	26·96	352,922	34·69	−22·0
Ross and Cromarty	1,297,308	27·08	3,166,531	74·17	−63·0
Skye and Lochalsh	515,714	44·74	427,913	42·41	5·0
Sutherland	698,277	52·85	997,605	78·81	−33·0

	(1) Total RSG 1987-88	(2) Total RSG per head 1987-88	(3) Total RSG 1978-79 in 1986-87 prices	(4) Total RSG per head 1978-79 in 1986-87 price	(5) Percentage change between column 2 and column 4
Regions					
East Lothian	1,512,254	18·47	2,812,136	35·7	−48·0
Edinburgh City	12,513,104	28·55	13,283,327	29·1	−2·0
Midlothian	3,100,730	38·16	4,280,388	50·71	−25·0
West Lothian	3,617,707	25·74	5,526,067	42·31	−39·0
Argyll and Bute	3,712,326	56·60	3,724,008	57·56	−2·0
Bearsden and Milngavie	615,782	15·33	1,704,323	43·82	−65·0
Clydebank	4,362,463	88·66	4,474,560	82·52	7·0
Clydesdale	2,375,903	40·76	2,399,805	42·79	−5·0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	1,964,426	31·43	2,427,921	39·23	−20·0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	2,787,310	64·03	3,107,957	66·61	−4·0
Cunninghame	3,697,912	26·96	5,508,373	40·8	−34·0
Dumbarton	1,409,745	17·78	3,218,793	40·5	−56·0
East Kilbride	1,449,300	17·71	3,108,537	37·15	−52·0
Eastwood	951,835	16·05	2,095,626	40·98	−59·0
Glasgow City	46,813,579	64·56	53,811,989	66·46	−3·0
Hamilton	3,903,354	36·50	7,160,877	66·81	−45·0

	(1) Total RSG 1987-88	(2) Total RSG per head 1987-88	(3) Total RSG 1978-79 in 1986-87 prices	(4) Total RSG per head 1978-79 in 1986-87 price	(5) Percentage change between column 2 and column 4
Inverclyde	3,675,399	37·80	5,570,393	54·17	−30·0
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	3,060,252	37·75	4,281,260	52·6	−28·0
Kyle and Carrick	2,313,844	20·46	4,658,043	41·4	−51·0
Monklands	5,516,803	51·55	8,478,040	77·01	−33·0
Motherwell	4,898,964	33·10	7,484,757	49·06	−33·0
Renfrew	7,869,812	38·73	9,961,113	46·72	−17·0
Strathkelvin	3,522,383	39·46	3,991,223	47·46	−17·0
Angus	2,394,766	25·71	3,597,592	39·13	−34·0
Dundee City	7,085,771	40·21	8,848,163	46·2	−13·0
Perth and Kinross	2,280,834	18·55	3,612,413	30·24	−39·0
Scotland	1,896,760,000	370·39	2,031,109,723	392·15	−6·0

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each district council area in Scotland those services on which authorities spend below the national average; and by how much.

Mr. Lang: This information is not readily available, and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Arts and Antiques Squad

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will request the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to reconstitute the arts and antiques squad; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It is for chief officers to take operational decisions about the deployment of the resources available to them. I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the need for a specialist arts and antiques squad is kept under review, but that there are no plans at present to re-establish the squad.

Economic League

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue guidance to police forces concerning contacts with the Economic League.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We see no grounds for doing so.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now inquire into alleged connections between the Economic League and the police forces of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: An inquiry was made by North Yorkshire police in March 1987 into allegations about the activities of the Economic League in that force's area. I am not aware of any other allegations about connections between the Economic League and the police. If the hon. Member has a specific case in mind, perhaps he would let me know.

Drug Trafficking

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advance there has been in making British law match more closely United Nations guidelines for legal sanctions on drug trafficking.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom has, since 1964, been a party to the United Nations single convention on narcotic drugs 1961, which requires the application of stringent controls over the production, manufacture, distribution and availability of such drugs, with the aim of preventing their diversion to the illicit trade. In 1986 the United Kingdom ratified the United Nations convention on psychotropic substances 1971, which requires similar controls over a wide range of synthetic drugs liable to misuse. The provisions of these conventions are embodied in the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, as amended by subsequent modification orders, and its associated regulations. We are now participating in negotiations on a new United Nations convention against illicit trafficking.

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what links have now been established between drug trafficking and terrorist activities.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have no direct evidence of such links in respect of terrorism directed against the United Kingdom or United Kingdom interests, but we remain alert to the possibility both at national level and in multilateral organisations such as Trevi.

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what rate of interception for illegal trafficking in drugs he treats as providing a reasonable indication of effective policing and an effective deterrent.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It is not possible to calculate an interception rate for covert illegal activity. But there are a number of indicators (for example, information over time about the availability, purity and street price of certain drugs) which chief officers can use to help them assess the effectiveness of their enforcement activities including their efficacy as a deterrent.

Law Officers

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration has been given to rationalising international law enforcement agreements so that law officers can have the same freedom of movement and operation on the people they are watching or pursuing.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Police officers may already follow suspects from one country to another when this appears to be necessary. The facilitation of international co-operation of this kind is one of the functions of the International Police Organisation (Interpol).

British Broadcasting Corporation

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next expects to meet the chairman of the British Broadcasting Corporation; and what issues he hopes to discuss.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. Friend has no plans to meet the chairman of the British Broadcasting Corporation in the immediate future. But, generally, we keep in close touch with the broadcasting authorities in order to discuss a wide range of issues.

Crime Prevention

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to seek to give members of the public greater protection against rape and other crimes of violence in subways: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We are strengthening the police and we have put before Parliament proposals which will increase certain penalties, strengthen existing controls over the possession of firearms and shotguns, prohibit the sale of specified offensive weapons, and make it an offence to possess a knife in a public place without good reason. Our current crime prevention publicity campaign is directed against the 4 per cent. of crime committed against the person as well as the 96 per cent. committed against property. These measures will help tackle violent crime wherever it may occur.

Drugs (Illicit Manufacture)

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for control of the manufacture or sale of raw materials which might be used to manufacture drugs illicitly.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Proposals to secure closer international collaboration for this purpose are being pursued vigorously alongside other major enforcement measures included in the draft of a new United Nations convention on drug trafficking.

Psychiatric Patients (Voting Rights)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to revise the Representation of the People Act 1983 to take account of the difficulties experienced by voluntary psychiatric patients who are required to record an address, other than the psychiatric hospital, for voting purposes.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. Voluntary patients in psychiatric hospitals may register as electors in respect of any address with which they have been associated other than the hospital address. Guidance to psychiatric hospitals makes it clear that any former address is acceptable and that no voluntary patient need lose his vote for want of an address.

Brixton Prison (Deaths)

Mr. Holland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the number of deaths *(a)* by suicide and *(b)* misadventure in Brixton prison since 1981.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Twenty verdicts of suicide and three of misadventure have been returned on inmates who have died at Brixton since the beginning of 1981. Three open verdicts have also been returned during that period on inmates who were found hanged at the prison, and the inquest on one inmate thought to have committed suicide there has yet to be held.

Prison Statistics

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) at what time prisoners are locked in their cells for the night at each of the following prisons: Birmingham, Leeds, Pentonville, Manchester, Wandsworth, Wormwood Scrubs and Holloway;

(2) how many prisoners spent on average *(a)* 20 or more hours a day and *(b)* 23 or more hours a day in their cells in the most recent convenient week at (i) Birmingham prison, (ii) Leeds prison, (iii) Pentonville prison, (iv) Manchester prison, (v) Wandsworth prison, (vi) Wormwood Scrubs prison and (vii) Holloway prison.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The daily routine for prisoners may vary both within and between prisons and from day to day. The information, which has been collated locally by the establishments concerned, relates to the week beginning 20 March 1988.

Establishment	*Average daily population*	*Numbers of prisoners who spent on average 20 or more hours a day in cells*	*Numbers of prisoners who spent on average 23 or more hours a day in cells*	*Time locked in cells for night*
Birmingham	1,149	546	Nil	Between 1900 hours and 2100 hours
Leeds	1,372	770	Nil	Between 1830 hours and 2030 hours
Pentonville	698	99	Nil	Between 1830 hours and 2000 hours
Manchester	1,755	916	Nil	2000 hours
Wandsworth	1,548	950	Nil	2045 hours
Wormwood Scrubs	925	350	Nil	Between 1915 hours and 2015 hours
Holloway	470	[1]6	[1]6	2000 hours

[1] Patients in hospital unit.

Firearms Certificate (Gwent)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the letter reference MLB/JD, dated 19 January 1985, from the prosecuting solicitor's office of Gwent Police Authority to an applicant for a firearms certificate, has been drawn to the attention of Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No.

EMPLOYMENT

Significant Private Sector Employers

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the number of

significant private sector employers in the United Kingdom; and if he will indicate what definition of significant his Department uses for this purpose.

Mr. Fowler: There is no statistical definition of "significant employers" and different firms will be significant in different contexts.

Training Schemes (The Arts)

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide the best available estimate of the proportion of individuals on YTS, the job training scheme and the community programme involved in working in the arts.

Mr. Cope: At 31 December 1987, it is estimated that 1·6 per cent. of YTS trainees were on training programmes in creative, educational and recreational service occupations. This figure excludes sports occupations.

Of the 224,000 people working on the community programme at 29 February 1988, approximately 2 per cent. were on projects defined as "cultural".

Similar information for the job training scheme is not available.

Wages Inspectorate

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list for each year from 1979 to 1987 in relation to (i) all wages councils, (ii) the Hat, Cap and Millinery wages council, (iii) the Clothing Manufacturing wages council, (iv) the Made-Up Textiles wages council and (v) the Retail Bespoke wages council *(a)* the number of homeworkers in respect of whom the Wages Inspectorate examined employers' records, *(b)* the number of homeworkers who were visited to check the accuracy of employers' records, *(c)* the number of homeworkers found to be underpaid as a result of a visit to check the accuracy of employers' records, *(d)* the amount of arrears assessed as due to those homeworkers, *(e)* the amount of arrears collected for them *(f)* the total number of homeworkers found to be underpaid, *(g)* the total amount of arrears assessed as due to them and *(h)* the total amount of arrears collected for them.

Mr. Nicholls: The statistics compiled by the Wages Inspectorate do not provide for separate identification of homeworkers visited to check employers' records who were found to be underpaid. Although figures are available for the amount of arrears assessed as due to all homeworkers, the amounts collected for them are not separately identifiable. However, in the experience of the inspectorate it is rare for arrears assessed as due to homeworkers not to be paid.

I regret that the figures stated in the *Official Report* for 23 May 1986, at columns 359 and 360, were incorrectly stated to be "arrears paid". The relevant line should have read "arrears assessed". The information requested which is available is in the following table:

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
All wages councils									
Number of homeworkers whose pay was checked in employers' records	3,570	2,565	1,665	1,358	1,974	1,883	1,606	1,374	858
Number of homeworkers visited to check pay	922	658	439	288	426	300		NA[1]	
Total number of homeworkers found to be underpaid	101	160	91	113	59	122	21	8	14
Total amount of arrears assessed as due to homeworkers	£4,065	£5,326	£4,815	£10,221	£8,325	£25,814	£2,909	£2,174	NA[1]
Hat, Cap and Millinery wages council									
Number of homeworkers whose pay was checked in employers' records	77	86	65	5	75	92	54	71	2
Number of homeworkers visited to check pay	11	79	19	5	36	15		NA[1]	
Total number of homeworkers found to be underpaid	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	NA[1]	
Total amount of arrears assessed as due to homeworkers	0	0	£150	0	0	0	0	NA[1]	
Clothing Manufacturing[2] wages council									
Number of homeworkers whose pay was checked in employers' records	2,373	1,641	957	985	1,085	1,440	1,187	1,041	464
Number of homeworkers visited to check pay	703	555	308	222	266	244		NA[1]	
Total number of homeworkers found to be underpaid	16	6	43	38	25	120	20	6	12
Total amount of arrears assessed as due to homeworkers	£489	£233	£1,448	£2,960	£2,559	£20,545	£2,179	£1,842	NA[1]
Made-up Textiles wages council									
Number of homeworkers whose pay was checked in employers' records	27	0	10	1	0	0	0	0	11

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
Number of homeworkers visited to check pay	2	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	NA[1]
Total number of homeworkers found to be underpaid	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total amount of arrears assessed as due to homeworkers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Retail Bespoke Tailoring wages council									
Number of homeworkers whose pay was checked in employers' records	56	33	15	15	26	24	26	24	26
Number of homeworkers visited to check pay	39	11	4	7	13	8		NA[1]	
Total number of homeworkers found to be underpaid	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	2	0
Total amount of arrears assessed as due to homeworkers	£5	£323	0	0	0	0	£30	£332	0

[1] NA—Not available due to a change in method of compiling statistics.
[2] Statistics for 1979 and 1980 relate to seven councils which were merged in 1980 to form the Clothing Manufacturing wages council

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list for each year from 1979 to 1987 *(a)* the total number of homeworkers found by the Wages Inspectorate to be earning less than the statutory minimum hourly rate but who were assessed as not being underpaid, *(b)* the total number of homeworkers found by the Wages Inspectorate to be earning less than the statutory minimum hourly rate and who were assessed as being underpaid and *(c)* *(a)* as a percentage of *(b)*;

(2) if he will list for each year from 1979 to 1987 in respect of (i) the Clothing Manufacturing, (ii) the Hat, Cap and Millinery (iii) the Made-Up Textiles and (iv) the Retail Bespoke Tailoring wages councils *(a)* the number of homeworkers found by the Wages Inspectorate to be earning less than the statutory minimum hourly rate but who were assessed as not being underpaid, *(b)* the number of homeworkers found by the Wages Inspectorate to be earning less than the statutory minimum hourly rate and who were assessed as being underpaid and *(c)* *(a)* as a percentage of *(b)*.

Mr. Nicholls: I regret that the comparisons requested cannot be provided. As virtually all homeworkers in the wages council trades are pieceworkers, what is checked and recorded by inspectors is whether the rates per piece paid by the employer meet the statutory minimum remuneration required of section 15 of the Act. If they do, no homeworker employed on that work is being underpaid. If any do not, all the workers (aged 21 or over) employed on the work concerned are being underpaid and arrears are assessed accordingly. The actual earnings of homeworkers are not therefore a factor in determining whether they are being paid at least the statutory minimum remuneration due. Provided an adequate piece rate has been fixed by the employer, it is up to individual pieceworkers how much they earn.

The numbers of homeworkers found to be underpaid in the wages council trades specified are provided in a separate reply.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will publish for 1986 and 1987 a table showing *(a)* the total number of workers found by the Wages Inspectorate to be earning less than the statutory minimum hourly rate but who were assessed as not being underpaid, *(b)* the number of workers found by the Wages Inspectorate to be earning less than the statutory minimum hourly rate and who were assessed as being underpaid and *(c)* *(a)* as a percentage of *(b)*;

(2) if he will publish for 1986 and 1987 in respect of (i) the Clothing Manufacturing, (ii) the Hat, Cap and Millinery, (iii) the Made-Up Textiles and (iv) the Retail Bespoke Tailoring wages councils *(a)* the number of workers covered by the Clothing Manufacturing wages council found by the Wages Inspectorate to be earning less than the statutory minimum hourly rate but who were assessed as not being underpaid, *(b)* the number of workers covered by the Clothing Manufacturing wages council found by the Wages Inspectorate to be earning less than the statutory minimum hourly rate and who were assessed as being underpaid and *(c)* *(a)* as a percentage of *(b)*.

Mr. Nicholls: I regret that the comparisons requested cannot be provided. Although the Wages Act 1986 enables wages councils to fix a minimum hourly rate, whether or not workers are earning above or below that rate is not necessarily recorded by wages inspectors. What inspectors check and record is whether the legal requirement is met, that is, whether the total sum paid to workers for the week is at least the statutory minimum remuneratin due for that week. Only workers found by inspectors to be receiving less are assessed and recorded as being underpaid. For time workers, statutory minimum remuneration is defined in section 14(4) of the Act. For pieceworkers, the definition is in section 15.

The figures requested for workers found to be underpaid in 1986 and 1987 are as follows:

	1986	1987
All wages councils	15,533	9,129
Clothing Manufacturing	942	630
Hat, Cap and Millinery	None	5
Made-up Textiles	2	1
Retail Bespoke Tailoring	10	4

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will publish in relation to all wages councils for 1986 and 1987 *(a)* the amount of arrears assessed by the Wages Inspectorate as due to workers but

not recovered, *(b)* the amount where recovery was not considered practicable, *(c)* the amounts in *(a)* and *(b)* expressed as percentages of the arrears actually recovered, *(d)* the number of workers in respect of whom arrears were assessed but not recovered, *(e)* the number of workers for whom recovery of arrears was not considered practicable and *(f)* the numbers in *(d)* and *(e)* expressed as percentages of the number to whom arrears were actually paid;

(2) if he will publish in relation to (i) the Clothing Manufacturing, (ii) the Hat, Cap and Millinery, (iii) the Made-Up Textiles and (iv) the Retail Bespoke Tailoring wages councils for 1986 and 1987 *(a)* the amount of arrears assessed by the Wages Inspectorate as due to workers but not recovered, *(b)* the amount where recovery was not considered practicable, *(c)* the amounts in *(a)* and *(b)* expressed as percentages of the arrears actually recovered, *(d)* the number of workers in respect of whom arrears were assessed but not recovered, *(e)* the number of workers for whom recovery of arrears was not considered practicable and *(f)* the numbers in *(d)* and *(e)* expressed as percentages of the number of workers to whom arrears were actually paid.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is given in the following table:

	All wages council trades		*Clothing manufacturing*		*Retail bespoke tailoring*	
	1986	*1987*	*1986*	*1987*	*1986*	*1987*
(a) Arrears assessed but not recovered	£756,707	£416,596	£38,425	£38,681	£136	£765
(b) Arrears where recovery was not considered practicable	£349,006	£193,135	£35,487	£34,058	£136	£765
(c1) *(a)* above as percentage of the arrears recovered	47·6	50·4	66·9	80·0	5·8	440
(c2) *(b)* above as a percentage of the arrears recovered	22·0	23·4	61·8	80·0	5·8	440
(d) Workers for whom arrears were assessed but not recovered	2,591	1,624	246	138	1	2
(e) Workers for whom recovery was not considered practicable	1,298	826	231	117	1	2
(f1) *(d)* above as a percentage of workers paid arrears	20·0	21·5	35·3	27·7	11·1	100
(f2) *(e)* above as a percentage of workers paid arrears	10·0	10·9	33·2	23·5	11·1	100

In 1986 and 1987, all arrears were fully recovered in the Hat, Cap and Millinery and the Made-Up Textiles wages council trades. The figures in the table do not indicate the extent to which arrears were recovered in the Clothing Manufacturing and Retail Bespoke Tailoring trades, or in wages council trades overall. The position in 1987 for wages council trades overall was as follows:

	£	*Per cent.*
Total arrears assessed	1,242,524	—
Arrears not pursued at the request of workers	223,461	18·0
Arrears not pursued for other reasons	193,135	15·5
Arrears paid	825,928	66·5

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will publish for each year from 1979 to 1987 the total number of establishments where employers were found by the Wages Inspectorate not to have displayed copies of wages orders as required by the wages council legislation: and if he will express this number as a percentage of the establishments visited by the inspectorate;

(2) if he will publish for each year from 1979 to 1987 the total number of establishments classified to the Clothing Manufacturing wages council where employers were found by the Wages Inspectorate not to have displayed copies of wages orders as required by the wages council legislation: and if he will express this number as a percentage of the establishments classified to the Clothing Manufacturing wages council visited by the inspectorate;

(3) if he will publish for each year from 1979 to 1987 the total number of establishments classified to the Hat, Cap and Millinery wages council where employers were found by the Wages Inspectorate not to have displayed copies of wages orders as required by the wages council legislation: and if he will express this number as a percentage of the establishments classified to the Hat, Cap and Millinery wages council visited by the inspectorate;

(4) if he will publish for each year from 1979 to 1987 the total number of establishments classified to the Made-up Textiles wages council where employers were found by the Wages Inspectorate not to have displayed copies of wages orders as required by the wages council legislation; and if he will express this number as a percentage of the establishments classified to the Made-up Textiles wages council visited by the inspectorate;

(5) if he will publish for each year from 1979 to 1987 the total number of establishments classified to the Retail Bespoke Tailoring wages council where employers were found by the Wages Inspectorate not to have displayed copies of wages orders as required by the wages council legislation: and if he will express this number as a percentage of the establishments classified to the Retail Bespoke Tailoring wages council visited by the inspectorate.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is in the following table:

Numbers of establishments found not to be displaying copies of wages orders

Percentages

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
All wages council trades									
(a) numbers of establishments checked by	8,555	9,188	6,822	6,568	7,388	8,525	8,370	8,057	6,275

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
visit found not to be displaying notices of wages orders									
(b) (a) as percentage if all establishments checked by visit	24·6	26·5	27·9	[1]28·2	28·0	32·1	31·9	33·1	33·1
Clothing Manufacturing wages council									
(a) numbers of establishments checked by visit found not to be displaying notices of wages orders	295	155	161	205	216	271	354	246	216
(b) (a) as percentage of all establishments checked by visit	25·7	19·8	23·0	31·4	27·1	27·2	30·6	28·8	24·4
Hat, Cap and Millinery wages council									
(a) numbers of establishments checked by visit found not to be displaying notices of wages orders	0	2	1	4	5	3	0	0	0
(b) (a) as percentage of all establishments checked by visit	—	11·1	7·7	36·3	15·6	12·0	—	—	—
Made-up Textiles wages council									
(a) numbers of establishments checked by visit found not to be displaying notices of wages orders	8	4	3	13	7	4	7	9	7
(b) (a) as percentage of all establishments checked by visit	26·6	18·2	14·3	54·1	17·9	14·8	23·3	21·9	30·4
Retail Bespoke Tailoring wages council									
(a) numbers of establishments checked by visit found not be displaying notices of wages orders	14	12	8	11	10	11	14	26	9
(b) (a) as percentage of all establishments checked by visit	20·5	26·1	19·5	31·4	18·2	13·9	24·5	43·3	27·2

The proportion of establishments found not to be displaying notices is not representative of all employers covered by wages councils. Visits by inspectors tend to be concentrated on establishments more likely to be underpaying workers and less likely, therefore, to be displaying the current notice stating the minimum rates.

[1] This figure was wrongly stated as 18·2 per cent. in a previous reply on 23 May 1986, at column 359 of the *Official Report*, due to an error in transcription.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Ornamental Horticulture

Mr. Lord: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the contribution of ornamental horticulture to the environment to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. MacGregor: I understand that arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 16 to 20 May.

Pigmeat

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of pigmeat production is accounted for by each member state of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The latest date for which this information is available is 1986. Details are as follows:

	Per cent.
West Germany	27
Netherlands	14
France	13
Spain	11
Denmark	9
Italy	9
United Kingdom	8
Belgium Luxembourg	6
Ireland	1
Greece	1
Portugal	1

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much in tonnes of pigmeat is in private storage presently; what is the amount of pigmeat remaining from 1987 storage that has been and is presently being released into a 1988 system; and if he will make a statement on the state of the pigmeat market and the United Kingdom average price per kilogram dead weight of pigs in the first quarter of the 1988 forecast.

Mr. Donald Thompson: During the first four weeks of the current scheme, almost 70,000 tonnes of pigmeat were contracted to go into store in the EC of which 671 tonnes will be in the United Kingdom. No pigmeat now remains in store from the 1987 scheme. The average all pigs price appears to have stabilised. Cereal prices continue to show a downward trend. The pigmeat MCA has fallen in the last four weeks by 4·8 points to −6·1 per cent. due to a strengthening of sterling. Our commitment to the removal of MCAs from the pigmeat sector remains.

Boxworth Experimental Husbandry Farm

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the research project into the effects of intensive farming methods on wildlife at

Boxworth experimental husbandry farm will be terminated; what the reasons for the termination are; whether he will publish the findings of the project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: There is no question of any premature termination of the Boxworth project. The five years of field work originally planned are scheduled to end with the 1988 harvest, but certain extensions have been agreed to enable further information to be obtained before final results are published. In the light of the interim reports, which have been published annually throughout the life of the project, we are already considering future research needs in this area and are in the process of inviting comments from interested organisations.

Research and Development

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place a copy of the Barnes review on the future of research and development in agriculture, fisheries and food in the Library.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) on 1 March at column *546*.

Horticultural Development Council

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out the anticipated level of grants for research and development services to the Horticultural Development Council in the next three years.

Mr. Donald Thompson: No grants are made to the Horticultural Development Council; it is self-financing from a levy on growers and exists to commission research and development of benefit to growers.

Milk Powder

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has any evidence that milk powder from the United Kingdom or European Community exported to Malaysia and the Philipines after April 1986 was subsequently rejected by those countries due to radioactive contamination; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: These countries have established extremely strict maximum permitted levels of radiocaesium in milk products and have rejected a small number of consignments of milk powder from EC countries (including the United Kingdom) on the grounds that these very low levels have been exceeded.

I must reiterate that in the light of the rigorous monitoring we have undertaken post-Chernobyl the United Kingdom Government are fully satisfied of the safety of all foodstuffs both on the domestic market and exported.

Bees

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many incidents of suspected poisoning of bees by pesticides his Department has investigated since the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 received Royal Assent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Since the Food and Environment Protection Act received Royal Assent on 16 July 1985 the Ministry has investigated a total of 191 incidents of suspected poisoning of honeybees in England and Wales. Of that total 132 were confirmed to be incidents involving pesticides. Several of the complaints clustered on particular periods and in particular vicinities and the figures may therefore represent a more limited number of spray applications.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline the procedures for protecting bees from the misuse of pesticides.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The system of official approval of pesticide products and the progressive introduction of strict controls over their use give considerable protection to bees and other wildlife.

General protection from the misuse of pesticides has been provided since October 1986. Each user of pesticides is required to take all reasonable precautions to protect the health of human beings, creatures and plants, to safeguard the environment and in particular to avoid the pollution of water. Employers and employees must meet additional requirements to ensure that people who apply pesticides are competent for their tasks. Aerial application of pesticides is further regulated, and aerial operators must give at least 48 hours notice to beekeepers of intended operations.

The pesticides approvals process takes full account of the need to protect bees and, where appropriate, additional conditions of use are specified for individual products. Since 1 January 1988 any such conditions have had the force of law.

Beekeepers themselves have an important role to play in ensuring that the safeguards provided by the legislation are fully effective: all keepers ought to be members of local spray warning liaison schemes so that information about aerial and ground operations can be communicated to them.

The Ministry investigates any wildlife deaths in England and Wales that might have been caused by pesticides. Similar arrangements are operated in Scotland. Information about harm to wildlife caused by pesticides is fed back into the pesticide approvals system. Cases involving possible misuse of pesticides are investigated with a view to detecting and prosecuting the offender.

In the case of honeybees, for England and Wales, deaths are investigated by bee experts at Luddington experimental horticulture station. In certain cases, particularly if disease is ruled out as the apparent cause of death, a field investigation by officers authorised under part III of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 and an analysis for traces of pesticides follow.

Country Landowners Association

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the purpose of the meeting between his Department and the Country Landowners Association on 21 April; and what subjects will be discussed.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* This meeting was offered by my officials in the light of the publication of a report by the north Wales group of the CLA on the effects of the Chernobyl accident which

contained a number of errors of fact as well as suggestions for further research. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the contents of the report and other matters of mutual concern with the CLA.

The meeting will be held later this month because it was not possible to find a mutually acceptable earlier date.

Peanuts

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps the Government have taken and propose to take to prevent the import of peanuts containing aflatoxin.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* Imports of peanuts for human consumption are subject to the Importation of Food Regulations 1984 under which it is an offence to import food which is unsound or unwholesome or otherwise unfit for human consumption. Supplementing this general provision, a voluntary agreement with the trade aims to ensure that the level of aflatoxin in imported peanuts is no greater than 0·03 mg/kg. However, following a recommendation of the Food Advisory Committee I intend to consult the interests concerned in the near future on the introduction of a statutory limit of 0·01 mg/kg on aflatoxin in nuts and nut products for sale for human consumption.

Under the Feedingstuffs Regulations 1988, peanuts for use in animal feedingstuffs may not be imported if the level of aflatoxin B_1 exceeds 0·05 mg/kg.

Horses (Reclassification)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take steps to reclassify the horse as an agricultural animal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* The classification of all horses as agricultural animals would involve amending a number of different legislative provisions concerned not only with agriculture but with such matters as planning and rating. I believe that horses do have a valuable contribution to make as the agricultural industry adjusts, but it is likely that much of this potential could be achieved without any comprehensive amendment of existing legislation.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Research and Development

4. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals he has to encourage a higher level of research and development expenditure by industry in the United Kingdom regions.

Mr. Butcher: The Government have created the right climate to enable industry to invest more in research and development in all parts of the United Kingdom. Within my Department's enterprise initiative, particular attention is given to the needs of the regions. In the assisted areas and urban programme areas support of up to two thirds of the cost of consultancy projects is available rather than half elsewhere. We have also introduced a special scheme — regional enterprise grants — to help firms in the development areas, with fewer than 25 employees, to finance their innovation projects and have expended SMART (Small Firms Merit Award for Research and Technology), reserving 20 awards for the urban programme areas.

British Steel

9. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what further progress has been made in transferring British Steel to the private sector.

Mr. Atkins: The British Steel Bill is currently in Committee. Other preparations for privatisation are also proceeding and a number of Government advisers have been appointed.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what recent representations he has received from Wales concerning the privatisation of the British Steel Corporation.

Mr. Atkins: I have received a small number of letters from various parties in Wales about points of detail. I have so far received few representations about the principle of privatisation itself.

Confectionery Retailers

14. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what estimate he has of the numbers of retailers of confectionery in the United Kingdom in 1984, 1985, 1986 and 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: It is estimated that at least 75,000 retail businesses in Great Britain sold some confectionery in 1986, but this figure does not cover incidental sales by small retailers or by many non-retail businesses.

Trade Deficit

15. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the trade deficit for each of the years 1975 to 1988.

Mr. Maude: The current account deficit was £1·7 billion for 1987. Figures for previous years will be printed in the *Official Report*. However, in the years 1975-1979 there was a cumulative deficit of over £2 billion, while in the years 1980-1986 there was a cumulative surplus of over £23 billion.

Total United Kingdom trade on a BOP basis

£ million

Year	*Current account balance*
1975	−1,582
1976	−895
1977	−112
1978	+965
1979	−604
1980	+3,035
1981	+6,743
1982	+4,480
1983	+3,753
1984	+2,009
1985	+3,276
1986	+46
1987	−1,679

17. **Mr. Stott:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the expenditure per head on industrial

research and development; and what information he has as to the comparable figures for the United States, Japan, France and West Germany.

Mr. Butcher: In 1985, the latest year for which internationally comparable information is available, expenditure on industrial research and development per head of population in the United Kingdom was £91. Corresponding figures for France, Japan, West Germany and the United States were £88, £126, £133 and £190, respectively. The information is obtained from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development using exchange rates at purchasing power parities calculated by them to convert foreign currencies to sterling. Where the population estimate for 1985 was not available that for the nearest available year has been taken.

USSR

18. **Mr. Chapman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will give the latest annual balance of trade between the United Kingdom and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mr. Maude: The balance of trade between the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union for 1987 shows a deficit of £384 million though turnover increased by almost 10 per cent. in 1987; United Kingdom exports fell by about 9 per cent. Ministers have emphasised to their Soviet counterparts our hope that a more balanced increase in bilateral trade can be achieved.

Rover Group

19. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will outline the current state of negotiations between Rover Group and British Aerospace; and if he will make a statement.

24. **Mr. McLoughlin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress has been made in the negotiations for the sale of the Rover Group.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have nothing further to add to my statement on 29 March.

Inner-city Policy

20. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what level of co-operation he is receiving from the private sector with regard to inner-city policies.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have been greatly encouraged by the response from the private sector to the action for cities drive launched by the Prime Minister on 7 March. I took part this morning in a breakfast presentation to around 200 business leaders in Newcastle. This was the first of a series of presentations to stimulate the involvement of companies in urban regeneration.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ak the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has any plans to visit Bermondsey to discuss his inner cities policy.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have no such plans at the moment.

Steel Industry

21. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his policy towards the lifting of steel quotas within the European Community.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: At a meeting of the Council of Industry Minister on 22 December which I attended, the Council unanimously concluded that production quotas should end on 30 June unless sufficient commitments on capacity reductions are made by member states. I will press the Council to stick to that clear agreement.

Airbus

22. **Mr. Irving:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress has been made in discussions with other partner Governments about future management of the Airbus programme.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The partner Governments have recently received a report by a small group of senior advisers, colloquially known as the "wise men", which the Airbus Ministers had asked to consider how the management of Airbus programmes should develop over the next years. I attended a meeting of the Airbus Ministers in Madrid yesterday at which we began our consideration of that report. We approved the principles underlying the report as a basis for future discussion and invited Airbus Industrie and the partner companies to put forward proposals and a precise schedule in order to put in place the new organisation before the end of 1988. We expect to receive and discuss those proposals at the next meeting of Airbus Ministers in Hanover on 5 May.

I have arranged for copies of the report to be placed in the House of Commons Library.

London Weighting Allowance

23. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much his Department spent on London weighting for its staff during 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: The cost of London weighting for the DTI for the 1987-88 financial year was £11·3 million.

Japan (Ministerial Visit)

25. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the Secretary of State's recent visit to Japan.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. and noble Friend visited Japan on 10 to 16 March accompanied by nine leaders of British industry. His visit combined meetings with Prime Minister Takeshita and his colleagues with further steps, in the light of the "Opportunity Japan" campaign, to identify the potential for an improved trading relationship with Japan and the scope for mutually beneficial industrial co-operation.

My right hon. and noble Friend had a constructive meeting with Mr. Tamura, Minister for International Trade and Industry. In addition to pressing for the speedy resolution of outstanding problems of access to the Japanese market, the Secretary of State noted the recent positive developments in bilateral trade and welcomed the continuing investment by Japanese companies in the

United Kingdom. Both Ministers welcomed the relaunch on a broader basis of official level talks between the two Departments.

My right hon. and noble Friend also met the Telecommunications Minister, Mr. Nakayama, with whom he confirmed an agreement on the liberalisation of value added telecommunication services between the United Kingdom and Japan.

Overall, my right hon. and noble Friend found the Japanese market to be one in which there was now a much greater role for imports: borne out by the recent steady increase in volume imports both globally and from the United Kingdom. The task now is to encourage British business to take maximum advantage of the opportunities opening up in Japan, and my Department will be working to this and through the "Opportunity Japan" campaign, recently launched by my right hon. and noble Friend.

26. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the launch of the Government's inner cities revival programme arranged by his Department.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister launched action for cities on 7 March. She was joined by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and colleagues from all the main Departments which have a part to play in helping regenerate our inner cities.

The Government will be spending about £3,000 million on urban regeneration in 1988-89, bringing in several times that amount in private investment. The Prime Minister announced 12 new Government initiatives, including a series of action for cities working breakfasts, aimed at business leaders, explaining to them how they and their companies can help the inner cities.

Waste (Recycling)

27. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his Department's plans for the promotion of recycling of waste materials.

Mr. Butcher: My Department encourages the economic reclamation and recycling of waste in three principal ways. There is an awareness campaign through a video, literature, conferences and other meetings. The issues and opportunities in individual sectors are taken up through specialist conferences and meetings. These have covered or will cover glass, paper, plastics, oil and the role of voluntary collectors. The Department's Warren Spring laboratory carries out research and development work on recycling problems and provides technical advice through its recycling advisory unit.

Enterprise Initiative

28. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the response to the enterprise initiative from business in Derbyshire.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Six hundred and three consultancy support inquiries under the Department's enterprise initiative have been received from businesses in Derbyshire up to 25 March 1988. To that date these inquiries had resulted in 40 applications for consultancies being processed.

Inward Investment

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will give a breakdown of inward investment in Britain by standard English region and for Scotland and Wales for each year since 1979, showing the amount received in each region as a proportion of the total in each year.

Mr. Atkins: The following are the Invest in Britain Bureau (IBB) figures for inward investments announced in each year since 1979 for the United Kingdom by standard English region, Scotland and Wales (with Northern Ireland added). Table 1 shows for each region the number of projects as a proportion of the total for each year. Table 2 shows for each region the number of associated jobs (both new and safeguarded) as a proportion of each year's total. The data include only those inward investment projects currently known to the IBB. The associated capital investment is not known.

Table 1

The number of inward investment projects: proportions of each year's total (in percentage terms) for each United Kingdom region

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
England									
North East	12	12	11	11	9	9	7	9	10
North West	5	10	9	10	9	12	7	10	7
Yorkshire and Humberside	15	11	4	5	4	2	4	3	7
West Midlands	6	2	5	1	5	4	17	22	17
East Midlands	8	3	6	10	5	3	5	4	4
South East	13	15	11	19	25	21	22	18	17
South West	7	4	6	5	4	4	4	3	4
Scotland	15	19	21	21	21	23	15	11	10
Wales	10	10	15	13	13	13	12	14	19
Northern Ireland	10	13	11	4	5	8	6	5	6
United Kingdom	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Some non-addition due to rounding errors.

Table 2
The number of associated jobs (both new and safeguarded) proportions of each year's total (in percentage terms) for each United Kingdom region

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
England									
North East	10	16	6	5	6	10	8	10	14
North West	3	5	7	12	6	7	8	10	7
Yorkshire and Humberside	8	5	1	1	3	2	12	1	6
West Midlands	6	6	3	1	14	15	15	23	16
East Midlands	8	2	2	8	3	2	2	2	3
South East	6	6	6	12	18	8	21	12	10
South West	13	5	13	12	3	4	3	6	3
Scotland	19	24	35	21	28	22	18	9	18
Wales	6	18	12	9	13	19	9	17	16
Northern Ireland	20	15	15	18	6	11	5	9	7
United Kingdom	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Some non-addition due to rounding errors.

Shipbuilding Industry

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received about his Department's policy towards the shipbuilding industry.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have received a number of representations.

Inner-city Policies (Sheffield)

Mr. Patnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress is being made with Government inner city policies in Sheffield.

Mr. Atkins: Sheffield will benefit directly from the inner city measures announced by the Prime Minister and other Ministers on 7 March. In particular the new urban development corporation in the lower Don Valley will unlock the enormous potential of some 2,000 acres of blighted land to the north-east of the city centre. The UDC will have a budget of about £50 million over seven years.

British Technology Group

Mr. Page: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has for the future of the British Technology Group.

Mr. Butcher: The British Technology Group (BTG) comprises the National Enterprise Board and the National Research Development Corporation. The Government consider that BTG is a public body whose operations may be appropriate for transfer to the private sector. Accordingly I have engaged Coopers and Lybrand Associates Limited to carry out a study into the feasibility and mechanics of privatising BTG.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Hospital Services, East Antrim

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish those plans of the Northern health board for hospital services in East Antrim which are based on the assumption that only a 300-bed hospital will be provided at Antrim.

Mr. Needham: In its area strategic plan for 1987 to 1992 which it published at the end of 1986, the Northern health and social services board has already set out in detail its proposals for all acute services in its area taking into account the services to be provided at the Antrim hospital.

Antrim Hospital

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated additional revenue expenditure which will be required by the Northern health and social services board to fund the proposed Antrim hospital for *(a)* phase I, and *(b)* phase II.

Mr. Needham: The new 300-bed hospital at Antrim will not be completed until 1992 and therefore final estimates of its revenue consequences are not yet available.

The possibility of further developments at Antrim falls outside the current planning period and no estimates can yet be made of either the capital or revenue costs of such developments.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many dwellings in each of the six housing executive regions in Northern Ireland are classified as houses in multiple occupation.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, but I understand from the chief executive that the number of dwellings classified as houses in multiple occupation is not known at present. However, the results of a survey should be available during May 1988.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when a definitive survey of houses in multiple occupation was last undertaken.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, but I understand from the chief executive that fieldwork on the first large scale survey of houses in multiple occupation was completed at the end of February 1988. The survey looked in particular at the physical condition of such dwellings, the degree of sharing of facilities and profiles of tenants. Results of the survey should be available during May 1988.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many tenants live in houses in multiple occupation in *(a)* Belfast and *(b)* Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, but I understand from the chief executive that information on the number of tenants living in houses in multiple occupation in Belfast and in Northern Ireland will be available only on completion of the analysis of a survey recently carried out.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many tenants live in houses in multiple occupation in each of the following district offices areas in South Down: *(a)* Downpatrick office area, *(b)* Kilkeel office area, *(c)* Newry district 1 office area and *(d)* Newry district 2.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, but I understand from the chief executive that this information is not available.

It is unlikely that the survey method employed in a recent survey will enable the disaggregation of information to district council levels.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in how many instances management directions have been made in respect of houses in multiple occupation since the operative date of the 1981 Housing (Northern Ireland) Order.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, but I understand from the chief executive that no management directives have been issued.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) in which district office areas special grants have been made payable by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive under the 1983 Housing (Northern Ireland) Order in respect of works required for the provision of a means of escape from fire in houses in multiple occupation since the operative date of the order;

(2) how many special grants have been made payable by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive under the 1983 Housing (Northern Ireland) Order in respect of works required for the provision of a means of escape from fire in houses in multiple occupation since the operative date of the order.

Mr. Needham: These are matters for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, but I understand from the chief executive that no special grants have been paid by the Housing Executive in respect of works required for the provision of a means of escape from fire in houses in multiple occupation.

Housing Associations

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide details of grants and loans made to each housing association in Northern Ireland by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, and indicate the years in which such grants were made.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, but I understand from the chief executive that no grants have been made to housing associations by the Housing Executive. Details of loans made to housing associations are as follows:

Name of Association and Year	*Amount of Loans* £
Derry Housing Association	
1975	18,000
Downpatrick Self Build Housing Association Ltd.	
1983-84	241,509
Millisle Self Build Housing Association Ltd.	
1982-83	139,775
1983-84	83,443
Cairnbeg Self Build Housing Association Ltd.	
1983-84	187,042
1984-85	76,938
Larne Self Build Housing Association Ltd.	
1983-84	240,813
1984-85	21,634
Dunlusken Self Build Housing Association Ltd.	
1982-83	216,682
1983-84	147,163
1984-85	9,661
Galgorm Self Build Housing Association Ltd.	
1981-82	71,896
1982-83	125,850
1983-84	19,125
Antrim Self Build Housing Association Ltd.	
1982-83	138,163
1983-84	93,178

Tenancies (Allocation)

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what basis of need tenants are selected by housing associations in Northern Ireland; and what additional provisions are made to ensure that such tenancies are allocated on the basis of housing needs.

Mr. Needham: Registered housing associations in Northern Ireland operate housing selection schemes based on the Housing Executive's tenant selection procedures. Some additions and revisions to individual schemes have been approved by the Department of the Environment (NI) in recognition of the specialist nature of many associations currently operating in the Province.

The Department monitors regularly the management of each association's day-to-day affairs, including the operation of its selection schemes to ensure that tenancies are allocated in accordance with approved schemes.

Unregistered housing associations operate in the private housing sector and are not under the control of the Department of the Environment (NI).

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sittings of the House

Mr. Amess: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list the occasions on which the House has sat later than 1.30 am since 1958; and what was the main business under discussion.

Mr. Wakeham: Details of the main business under discussion each time the House has sat later than 1.30 am could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The House sat later than 1.30 am during the 1957-58 Session and 1958-59 Session on the following occasions:

House sits after 1.30 am

Session	Number of occasions	Time at which adjourned (a.m. unless stated)	Date
1957-58	4	1.53	23 July 1958
		2.25	1 July 1958
		2.41	2 July 1958
		3.50	6 March 1958
1958-59	3	1.37	6 July 1959
		1.53	3 March 1959
		3.56	27 July 1959

Detailed information about the occasions when the House sat after 1.30 am during the period 1959-60 Session up to and including the 1984-85 Session was published in the *Official Report*, columns *569-78* on 14 February 1986 in a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor). The number of occasions when the House sat later than 1.30 am during these Sessions is as follows:

Occasions when House sat after 1.30 am

Session	Number
1959-60	8
1960-61	16
1961-62	10
1962-63	9
1963-64	4
1964-65	27
1965-66	7
1966-67	40
1967-68	21
1968-69	24
1969-70	9
1970-71	33
1971-72	30
1972-73	24
1973-74	4
1974	10
1974-75	35
1975-76	39
1976-77	23
1977-78	21
1978-79	8
1979-80	41
1980-81	28
1981-82	22
1982-83	13
1983-84	34
1984-85	35

The information requested for the period 1985-86 Session to date is as follows:

Session	Number of occasions	Time at which adjourned (a.m. unless stated)	Date
1985-86	18	1.34	25 March 1986
		1.40	10 December 1985
		1.43	20 May 1986
		1.49	20 January 1986
		1.50	16 July 1986
		1.56	19 February 1986
		2.04	17 February 1986
		2.12	21 May 1986
		2.12	1 July 1986
		2.21	11 February 1986
		2.48	14 July 1986
		2.51	9 June 1986
		4.29	21 October 1986
		5.24	23 July 1986
		8.25	24 July 1986
		8.30	13 March 1986
		9.27	18 December 1985
		9.47	5 June 1986
1986-87	6	2.07	11 March 1987
		2.52	3 February 1987
		3.17	1 April 1987
		9.29	24 March 1987
		9.30	15 December 1986
		[1]4.38	10 December 1986
1987-88[2]	18	1.34	14 July 1987
		1.40	17 February 1988
		1.50	9 February 1988
		1.53	6 July 1987
		1.53	7 July 1987
		1.53	15 December 1987
		2.20	8 February 1988
		2.23	30 March 1988
		2.31	2 December 1987
		2.47	2 March 1988
		2.55	29 March 1988
		2.56	3 February 1988
		3.27	20 July 1987
		4.01	21 October 1987
		4.07	9 March 1988
		8.30	10 March 1988
		9.27	13 July 1987
		[1]8.55	10 November 1987

[1] pm.
[2] To date.

THE ARTS

Attendance Figures

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister for the Arts what estimates he can give of the total annual attendance figures at *(a)* London dance centres, *(b)* provincial dance centres, *(c)* London art centres, *(d)* provincial art centres, *(e)* London museums and galleries, *(f)* provincial museums and galleries, *(g)* London cinemas, *(h)* provincial cinemas and *(i)* all arts and museums, including theatre, concerts and opera, for the years 1984-85, 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88.

Mr. Luce: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

NATIONAL FINANCE

European Monetary System

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from other European Community members or central bankers about the United Kingdom joining the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system.

Mr. Lilley: A number of our partners have expressed views on United Kingdom participation in the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system.

Building Societies Commission

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will indicate the reasons for the increase in funds raised for the Building Societies Commission under the General Charge and Fees Regulations from £1·95 million in 1987-88 to £3·322 million in 1988-89; to what extent this increase is attributable to an increase in the value of assets owned by building societies; and what is the cost of administering the Building Societies Commission in 1987-88 and in 1988-89.

Mr. Lilley: I regret that there was a printing error in the explanatory note to the Building Societies (General Charge and Fees) Regulations 1988; the expected receipts from the general charge for 1988-89 are £2,322,000, not £3,322,000. A correction slip is being issued. The explanatory note does not form a part of this order, which remains valid.

The final outturn of the Building Societies Commission's expenditure on services to societies in 1987-88 is not yet available. It is expected to be slightly higher than the actual receipts from the general charge of £1·96 million. The expected cost of the services for 1988-89 is £2·3 million.

The increase in costs is due to the development of the prudential work of the commission and rises in salary and price levels. The fees schedule for 1988-89 has been adjusted to reflect the increased costs, the increase in assets of societies and to recoup the under-recovery of costs from 1986-87.

Consultancy Contracts

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency in 1987, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment;

(2) if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by Her Majesty's Treasury in 1987, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 30 March 1988]:* The following management or computer consultancy contracts were awarded by Her Majesty's Treasury in 1987. With the exception of the first six, all were placed by the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA):

Firm	*Subject of assignment*
KPMG Peat Marwick McLintock	Multi Departmental Review of Budgeting and associated work
Douglas Llambias Associates	Advice on advertising with the aim of attracting more applicants for accountancy vacancies and suggesting potential applicants
Wyatt and Company UK Ltd. Actuaries and Consultants	To assess the suitability of the multicomp approach to job evaluation in the Civil Service
M N Pickett	Advice on contracts and contract conditions
B J Stent	Advice on documentation for Central Unit on Purchasing internal planning and control
Atkins Consultancy	Public Sector Procurement
Carnell Computer Technology Ltd	Upgrade of the Government Accounting Package (GAP)
Spicer and Pegler Associates	Study on Impact of 4th Generation Software
Advance Management Limited	Security in IT Turnkey Systems
SIS Applied Systems	Production of an Automated Support Tool for CRAMM
PA Computers and Telecommunications	Physiological Access Control Study—Phase 2
Logica UK Limited	Government Open Systems Interface (OSI) Addressing
BIS Applied Systems	Government Data Network (GDN) Security Support
National Computing Centre (NCC) Limited	Office Documentation Architecture
Intersect Limited	Assistance with QA of Third Party Maintenance (TPM) Suppliers
Professor K. Counter	Review of standard contract conditions
Yale Data Management Consultants	Provision of systems consultant
C Cubed Services	Provision of systems consultant
PE Computer Services	Provision of systems consultant
Computer Capacity Management Services Limited	Development of Guidance on cost management

Firm	Subject of assignment
BIS Applied Systems	Employment of a Technical Author
Logica Consultancy Limited	Preparation of an IBM Company profile
C. J. Makemson	GOSIP (Government OSI Profile) virtual terminal profiles
EPI Limited (Electrical Power Interface)	Study of Power supply to DHSS Birkenhead
Butler Cox and Partners	User System Interaction Study
EFD Limited (Electronic Facilities Design)	MITSY Evaluation Project
The Instruction Set Limited	Common Applications Environment for Government
BIS Applied Systems Limited	Study on Video Teleconferencing in Government (Vitesse)
Oasis Limited	Study to produce a plan for standards
Model Systems Limited	Ad hoc support to SSADM Implementation Field Trials
Data Dictionary Systems Limited	Ad hoc support to SSADM Implementation Field Trials
Model Systems Limited	Review of Computer assisted support environment (CASE)
Coopers and Lybrand plc	Quality Assurance on Terms of Reference for PROMPT Enhance Project
National Computing Centre (NCC) Limited	Enhancement to PROMPT II Methodology
Knudsen Computer Systems	Database Conversion
Kermon Associates Limited	Consultancy for Government Data Network (GDN) Project
N Way Associates	Review of Contracts Handbook
J Kenny Microelectronic Services	Provision of consultancy services for MITSY Project
Advance Management Limited	Security in IT Turnkey Systems
Lorien Computer Services Limited	Provision of consultancy for Programme and Data Management Branch
Online People Incorporated	Development of Proteo demonstrator
Metron Technology Limited	Development of a protype interface between SSADM and a capacity planning tool
PA Computers and Telecommunications	Consultancy Support for the Government Data Network (GDN) Project
Systems Designers Scientific	Network security consultant
Systems Designers Scientific	Distributed Secure Systems Technology Demonstrator
ICL (Defence Technology Centre)	Project SPACE
Logica Space and Defence Systems	Audit Trail Analysis
Praxis System plc	Development of Computer Aided Support Environment (CASE)
Nolan Norton and Company	Investigation into Function Point Analysis (FPA)
Babelease Limited	ERA Model of SSADM Implementation in COBOL and Quickbuild
Babelease Limited	Computer Supported Process Logic Definition
ICL (UK) Limited	Knowledge Engineering Consultancy
Learmonth and Burchett Management Systems (LBMS)	SSADM Consultancy Support
EOSYS Limited	Integrated Information Systems Study
Learmonth and Burchett Management Systems (LBMS)	Development of Compact Support Tools
Peat Marwick Mitchell & Co.	Production of an IT Management Guide on Fault Tolerant Systems
PA Computers and Telecommunications	Consultancy support for the Government IT Infrastructure Management Methodology (GITIMM)
Computer Sciences Company Limited	Consultancy support for the Government IT Infrastructure Management Methodology (GITIMM)
IBM (UK) Limited	Consultancy support for the Government IT Infrastructure Management Methodology (GITIMM)
ICL (UK) Limited	Consultancy support for the Government IT Infrastructure Management Methodology (GITIMM)

Financial Institutions (Consumer Loans)

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to discuss with the Governor of the Bank of England capital adequacy requirements for financial institutions engaged in the provision of consumer loans; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* No.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Mental Hospitals

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the mental hospitals which are scheduled to *(a)* open and *(b)* close in each health region in England and Wales in each of the next seven years.

Mrs. Currie: The table lists those mental illness hospitals which have, or have had, over 200 beds and which the regional health authorities in England have indicated they plan to close by about 1995, subject to the results of the public consultation which has yet to take place, or is now under way, and to the provision of appropriate alternative accommodation and services.

We have no comprehensive information available on those mental illness hospitals or units which are scheduled to open by 1995.

Details relating to hospitals in Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mental illness hospitals which have, or have had, over 200 beds which regional health authorities have indicated they plan to close, subject to consultation and to suitable alternative provision being made, by about 1995.

Region and hospital:
Yorkshire

Broadgate Hospital, Beverley
Storthes Hall Hospital, Huddersfield
Clifton Hospital, York
Scalebor Park Hospital, Ilkley
Highroyds Hospital, Ilkley
Stanley Royd Hospital, Wakefield

Trent
Pastures Hospital, near Derby
Carlton Hayes Hospital, Narborough
St. John's Hospital, Lincoln
Rauceby Hospital, Sleaford
Saxondale Hospital, Nottingham
Mapperley Hospital, Nottingham
Middlewood Hospital, Sheffield

East Anglian
St. Audry's Hospital, Woodridge
St. Nicholas Hospital, Great Yarmouth
Hellesden Hospital, Norwich
or
St. Andrew's Hospital, Norwich

North West Thames
Hill End Hospital, St. Albans

North East Thames
Friern Hospital, New Southgate
Claybury Hospital, Woodford Bridge

South East Thames
Cane Hill Hospital, Coulsdon
Tooting Bec Hospital, Tooting Bec
Hellingly Hospital, Hailsham

South West Thames
Long Grove Hospital, Epsom
Brookwood Hospital, Brookwood

Wessex
Knowle Hospital, Fareham
Whitecroft Hospital, Isle of Wight
Herrison Hospital, West Dorset
St. James Hospital, Portsmouth (with some residual provision expected to remain on site)
Old Manor Hospital, Salisbury (with some residual provision expected to remain on site)

Oxford
St. John's Hospital, Aylesbury
St. Crispin's Hospital, Northampton

South Western
Mendip Hospital, Wells
Moorhaven Hospital, Ivybridge.

West Midlands
Powick Hospital, Worcester

Mersey
Rainhill Hospital, Prescot (with some provision remaining on site)

North Western
Prestwich Hospital, Salford (with some MI Regional Specialities remaining on site)

Pathology Staff

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to receive the report of the independent study commissioned by the National Health Service Management Board's manpower planning advisory group on the provision of pathology staffing; and what representations he has had on the subject of this provision.

Mr. Newton: The report of the independent review commissioned by the NHS management board's manpower planning advisory group on pathology staffing has been received, and is under consideration. The Institute of Medical Laboratory Scientific Officers has requested a meeting with the chief executive of the management board to discuss the report, and about a dozen letters have been received on various aspects of the review.

Amphetamines

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what consideration has been given to reclassifying amphetamines as class A drugs so as to ensure that illegal production, trafficking and supply of such drugs attracts the higher criminal penalties associated with such a category.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

Offences involving amphetamines in injectable form already attract the highest level of maximum penalties under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. We have no plans to reclassify other forms of amphetamines; trafficking in these attracts penalties of up to 14 years' imprisonment.

Community Psychiatric Nurses

Mr. Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the numbers of community psychiatric nurses employed by each district health authority.

Mr. Newton: Information in the exact form requested is not available. However the number of nursing staff employed in the community psychiatric service in each district health authority in England at 30 September 1986 is shown in the table.

NHS community psychiatric nursing staff at 30 September 1986 England

Region	*Whole-time equivalent*[1]
Northern	158
Yorkshire	199
Trent	260
East Anglian	106
North West Thames	168
North East Thames	137
South East Thames	208
South West Thames	209
Wessex	176
Oxford	122
South Western	147
West Midlands	255
Mersey	156
North Western	228
London post-graduate special health authorities	2
England Total	2,532

Northern Regional Health Authority

District health authorities	*Whole-time equivalent*[1]
Hartlepool	9
North Tees	10
South Tees	13
East Cumbria	11
South Cumbria	10
West Cumbria	2
Darlington	15
Durham	10
North West Durham	4

District health authorities	Whole-time equivalent[1]
South West Durham	14
Northumberland	20
Gateshead	4
Newcastle-upon-Tyne (T)	18
North Tyneside	—
South Tyneside	—
Sunderland	18
Regional Total	158

Yorkshire Regional Health Authority

District Health Authorities	Whole-Time Equivalent[1]
Hull	7
East Yorkshire	31
Grimsby	7
Scunthorpe	12
Northallerton	11
York	22
Scarborough	9
Harrogate	2
Bradford	9
Airedale	17
Calderdale	6
Huddersfield	9
Dewsbury	5
Leeds Western (T)	22
Leeds Eastern (T)	11
Wakefield	11
Pontefract	8
Regional Total	199

Trent regional health authority

District health authorities	Whole-time equivalent[1]
North Derbyshire	26
South Derbyshire	33
Leicestershire (T)	43
North Lincolnshire	25
South Lincolnshire	16
Bassetlaw	7
Central Nottinghamshire	13
Nottingham (T)	39
Barnsley	14
Doncaster	9
Rotherham	12
Sheffield (T)	24
Regional Total	260

East Anglia Regional Health Auihority

District Health Authorities	Whole-Time equivalent[1]
Cambridge (T)	14
Peterborough	13
West Suffolk	4
East Suffolk	18
Norwich	24
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	12
West Norfolk and Wisbech	8
Huntingdon	13
Regional Total	106

North West Thames Regional Health Authority

District health authorities	Whole-time equivalent[1]
North Bedfordshire	9
South Bedfordshire	11
North Hertfordshire	7
East Hertfordshire	10
North West Hertfordshire	8
South West Hertfordshire	4
Barnet	16
Harrow	15
Hillingdon	8
Hounslow and Spelthorne	12
Ealing	27
Brent	10
Paddington and North Kensington (T)	6
Riverside	26
Regional Total	168

North-East Thames Regional Health Authority

District Health Authorities	Whole-time equivalent[1]
Basildon and Thurrock	11
Mid Essex	13
North East Essex	18
West Essex	11
Southend	4
Barking/Havering/Brentwood	13
Hampstead (T)	20
Bloomsbury (T)	10
Islington	8
City and Hackney (T)	7
Newham	9
Tower Hamlets (T)	2
Enfield	3
Haringey	2
Redbridge	3
Waltham Forest	3
Regional Total	137

South East Thames regional health authority

District health authorities	Whole-time equivalents[1]
Brighton	21
Eastbourne	21
Hastings	23
South East Kent	29
Canterbury and Thanet	—
Dartford and Gravesham	10
Maidstone	11
Medway	12
Tunbridge Wells	9
Bexley	13
Greenwich	11
Bromley	1
West Lambeth (T)	20
Camberwell (T)	9
Lewisham and North Southwark (T)	20
Regional Total	208

South West Thames regional health authority

District health authorities	Whole-time equivalent[1]
North West Surrey	14
West Surrey and North East Hampshire	9
South West Surrey	8
Mid-Surrey	20
East Surrey	13
Chichester	25

District health authorities	Whole-time equivalent[1]
Mid-Downs	25
Worthing	13
Croydon	13
Kingston and Esher	15
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	9
Wandsworth (T)	32
Merton and Sutton	14
Regional Total	209

Wessex Regional Health Authority

District Health Authorities	Whole-Time equivalent[1]
East Dorset	35
West Dorset	19
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	20
Southampton and South West Hampshire (T)	20
Winchester	16
Basingstoke and North Hampshire	8
Salisbury	12
Swindon	13
Bath	34
Isle of Wight	—
Regional Total	176

Oxford Regional Health Authority

District Health Authorities	Whole-time equivalent[1]
East Berkshire	24
West Berkshire	15
Aylesbury Vale	21
Wycombe	11
Milton Keynes	5
Kettering	15
Northampton	14
Oxfordshire (T)	18
Regional Total	122

South Western regional health authority

District health authorities	Whole-time equivalent[1]
Bristol and Weston (T)	16
Frenchay	12
Southmead	17
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	15
Exeter	29
North Devon	9
Plymouth	6
Torbay	10
Cheltenham	11
Gloucester	12
Somerset	12
Regional Total	147

West Midland Regional Health Authority

District Health Authorities	Whole-Time equivalent[1]
Bromsgrove and Redditch	10
Herefordshire	12
Kidderminster and District	6
Worcester and District	14
Shropshire	27
Mid-Staffordshire	18
North Staffordshire	25
South East Staffordshire	9
Rugby	—
North Warwickshire	4
South Warwickshire	18
Central Birmingham (T)	6
East Birmingham	9
North Birmingham	12
South Birmingham	18
West Birmingham	6
Coventry	16
Dudley	15
Sandwell	10
Solihull	14
Walsall	—
Wolverhampton	6
Regional Total	255

Mersey regional health authority

District health authorities	Whole-time equivalent[1]
Chester	11
Crew	10
Halton	11
Macclesfield	7
Warrington	20
Liverpool (T)	29
St. Helens with Knowsley	38
Southport and Formby	9
South Sefton	7
Wirral	15
Regional Total	156

North Western regional health authority

District health authorities	Whole-time equivalent[1]
Lancaster	13
Blackpool Wyre and Fylde	17
Preston	15
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	18
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	—
West Lancashire	8
Chorley and South Ribble	15
Bolton	12
Bury	13
North Manchester	13
Central Manchester (T)	10
South Manchester (T)	16
Oldham	6
Rochdale	—
Salford (T)	19
Stockport	14
Tameside and Glossop	11
Trafford	15
Wigan	14
Regional Total	228

Source: DHSS (SR7) Annual Census of NHS Non-Medical Manpower.

[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest whole-time equivalent.

(T) Denotes Teaching District Health Authorities.

Long-stay Patients

Mr. Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to ensure that departmental statistics will in future distinguish places in accommodation in an informal domestic environment providing long-stay patients with 24-hour medical and nursing supervision, in each district health authority.

Mrs. Currie: Separate information has been collected centrally on small National Health Service units in the community for mentally handicapped people since 1984. At present there are no figures for such units for mentally ill people, but the need for separate data will be monitored in conjunction with the National Health Service.

Abortion

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the number of women resident in the United Kingdom who had an abortion in 1986 who already had *(a)* one, *(b)* two, *(c)* three, *(d)* four or *(e)* five previous abortions;

(2) if he will list the number of women not usually resident in the United Kingdom who had an abortion in 1986 who already had *(a)* one, *(b)* two, *(c)* three, *(d)* four or *(e)* five previous abortions.

Mr. Newton: The available information is given in the table.

Number of notifications of abortions carried out under the Abortion Act 1967 to (a) residents of United Kingdom and (b) non-residents of United Kingdom by number of previous abortions under the Act England and Wales 1986

Number of previous abortions under the Act	Residents of the United Kingdom	Non-residents of the United Kingdom
1	23,838	3,042
2	3,228	359
3	548	79
4	131	22
5	23	4

Women having more than one abortion in 1986 will be counted more than once in this table.

Smoking and Health

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what review of health research has been set in hand to reflect the conclusions of the World Health Organisation congress on smoking and health held in Tokyo in 1987;

(2) if his Department is in possession of any scientific evidence on the health implications of tobacco published since 1979.

Mrs. Currie: The Department keeps in touch with all published research work on the health implications of tobacco and takes expert advice from the committee for research into behavioural aspects of smoking and health, and from the independent scientific committee on smoking and health, the fourth of whose reports was published by the Health Departments last month. No additional review of research has been set in hand as a result of the Tokyo conference, which was attended by officials of the Department, but the report of the conference will be carefully studied when it is available in order to consider its implications for the development of policy on smoking and health.

My hon. Friend may like to refer to the independent scientific committee's report which quoted a large number of research studies done both in the United Kingdom and overseas. A copy is in the Library.

Health Index

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Livingston, of 17 March, *Official Report*, column *679*, when he expects to receive the result of the feasibility study of creating a health index; and what arrangement he is making to publish it.

Mr. Newton: We hope to receive advice from officials, based on their initial consideration of the feasibility of this idea, in the next few weeks. Such advice is not intended for publication, but rather to enable consideration to be given to what further action if any, including a statement or publication, is appropriate.

AIDS

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list those district health authorities which have received money from the extra allocation of £10 million for the treatment of AIDS announced by him on 16 December, *Official Report*, column *1094*; and what monitoring arrangements he has made to ensure that these moneys are spent efficiently and specifically on AIDS patients.

Mr. Newton: The £10 million allocated in December 1987 was an additional recognition of the particular pressures faced by three of the Thames regional health authorities in providing services for people with HIV infection and AIDS during 1987/88. The money was allocated as follows: £6 million to North-West Thames, £2·5 million to North-East Thames and £1·5 million to South-East Thames. These authorities will be asked to account for their total expenditure on AIDS-related services as part of the usual health authority planning and outturn procedures.

Maternal Deaths

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect maternal deaths in England in each year between 1979 and 1981 occurred in National Health Service hospitals without consultant obstetric units; and how many were associated with anaesthesia.

Mrs. Currie: In 1979-81 there were 22 direct maternal deaths directly due to anaesthesia in England and Wales. There were also a further seven deaths where the administration of anaesthesia made a contribution and of these deaths two were direct and five indirect maternal deaths. Information on where death occurred and the type of obstetric unit is not available.

Consultants

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give details of regional health authorities and special health authorities which have instituted disciplinary proceedings against consultants for failure to fulfil the terms of their National Health Service contracts.

Mr. Newton: We do not become involved in disciplinary proceedings against consultants other than in those cases where a consultant appeals to the Secretary of State against dismissal under paragraph 190 of the terms and conditions of service. The information requested is not therefore held centrally.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to publish guidelines for regional health authorities and special health authorities to help them to monitor consultants.

Mr. Newton: We have no plans to do so.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will institute a survey to determine the numbers of hours a week devoted by consultants to *(a)* National Health Service work and *(b)* private practice; and if he will break this down by specialty, region and by type of contract.

Mr. Newton: We have no plans to carry out such a survey.

Midwives and Health Visitors

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number of midwives and health visitors employed in each district health authority, health region and in the United Kingdom; and what knowledge on a national or regional basis his Department has about the case load each midwife and health visitor has.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many midwives and health visitors are employed by each of the health authorities in the North-West regional health authority.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 1 February 1988]:* The number of midwives and health visitors in each district health authority in England at 30 September 1986 is shown in table 1. The total number of live and still births in each region in England during 1986 and the number of home visits by health visitors over the same period are shown in tables 2 and 3 respectively. A direct comparison between the staffing and activity figures may be misleading as the activity information given does not reflect the full work load of these staff.

The information for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Northern Ireland.

Table 1
Midwifery staff and health visitors by district health authority
30 September 1986

whole-time equivalents[1]

District Health Authority	*Midwives*[2]	*Health Visitors*[3]
England[4]	19,153	10,428
Northern RHA	1,305	691
Hartlepool	53	22
North Tees	84	33
South Tees	145	61
East Cumbria	77	35
South Cumbria	47	36
West Cumbria	70	32
Darlington	58	24
Durham	71	42
North West Durham	39	20
South West Durham	63	35
Northumberland	105	71
Gateshead	57	54
Newcastle	176	80
North Tyneside	56	45
South Tyneside	59	30
Sunderland	144	71
Yorkshire RHA	1,524	743
Hull	102	47
East Yorks	64	41
Grimsby	87	27
Scunthorpe	60	38
Northallerton	26	27
York	98	51
Scarborough	54	31
Harrogate	60	22
Bradford	202	86
Airedale	68	35
Calderdale	93	48
Huddersfield	77	49
Dewsbury	88	35
Leeds Western	123	71
Leeds Eastern	149	73
Wakefield	78	26
Pontefract	96	36
Trent RHA	1,778	956
North Derbyshire	113	79
Southern Derbyshire	160	91
Leicestershire	307	187
North Lincolnshire	84	52
South Lincolnshire	107	58
Bassetlaw	30	19
Central Nottinghamshire	128	64
Nottingham	296	141
Barnsley	83	48
Doncaster	115	59
Rotherham	99	53
Sheffield	256	106
East Anglian regional health authority	800	375
Cambridge	114	60
Peterborough	95	42
West Suffolk	111	46
East Suffolk	93	57
Norwich	199	78
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	59	36
West Norfolk and Wisbech	71	31
Huntingdon	59	26
North West Thames regional health authority	1,223	810
North Bedfordshire	88	54
South Bedfordshire	121	64
North Hertfordshire	82	39
East Hertfordshire	70	53
North West Hertfordshire	72	51
South West Hertfordshire	87	48
Barnet	114	71
Harrow	94	48
Hillingdon	89	49
Hounslow and Spelthorne	99	68
Ealing	59	82
Brent	62	56
Paddington and North Kensington	87	46
Riverside	100	82
North East Thames regional health authority	1,620	737
Basildon and Thurrock	106	47
Mid Essex	73	52
North East Essex	109	55
West Essex	93	45
Southend	102	49
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	136	64
Hampstead	53	33
Bloomsbury	74	35
Islington	112	41
City and Hackney	170	56
Newham	51	39
Tower Hamlets	112	60
Enfield	93	42
Haringey	67	42
Redbridge	101	41
Waltham Forest	104	37
Regional health authority and headquarter units[5]	65	—
South East Thames RHA	1,531	834
Brighton	43	71
Eastbourne	58	54
Hastings	60	35
South East Kent	86	60
Canterbury and Thanet	119	53
Dartford and Gravesham	114	54
Maidstone	60	38
Medway	163	65

District Health Authority	Midwives[2]	Health Visitors[3]
Tunbridge Wells	96	35
Bexley	97	49
Greenwich	85	53
Bromley	110	66
West Lambeth	108	49
Camberwell	179	56
Lewisham and North Southwark	153	97
South West Thames RHA	1,014	639
North West Surrey	85	45
West Surrey and North East Hants	69	67
South West Surrey	62	37
Mid Surrey	47	39
East Surrey	53	41
Chichester	58	32
Mid Downs	98	65
Worthing	65	45
Croydon	119	57
Kingston and Esher	80	41
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	46	59
Wandsworth	142	40
Merton and Sutton	92	73
Wessex RHA	1,053	608
East Dorset	110	79
West Dorset	53	38
Portsmouth and South East Hants	198	108
Southampton and South West Hants	162	83
Winchester	90	53
Basingstoke and North Hants	77	51
Salisbury	56	35
Swindon	118	50
Bath	142	84
Isle of Wight	48	28
Oxford RHA	961	563
East Berkshire	135	81
West Berkshire	157	98
Aylesbury Vale	60	38
Wycombe	100	67
Milton Keynes	84	41
Kettering	93	57
Northampton	136	67
Oxfordshire	196	114
South Western RHA	1,047	680
Bristol and Weston	158	85
Frenchay	26	50
Southmead	146	51
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	105	96
Exeter	75	58
North Devon	40	25
Plymouth	156	70
Torbay	56	43
Cheltenham and District	65	43
Gloucester	101	68
Somerset	119	91
West Midlands RHA	2,145	1,118
Bromsgrove and Redditch	55	33
Herefordshire	50	31
Kidderminster and District	29	32
Worcester and District	81	51
Shropshire	135	96
Mid Staffordshire	92	60
North Staffordshire	197	98
South East Staffordshire	83	51
Rugby	29	20
North Warwickshire	92	40
South Warwickshire	64	42
Central Birmingham	166	42
East Birmingham	26	36
North Birmingham	98	36
South Birmingham	104	49
West Birmingham	127	51
Coventry	135	62
Dudley	98	62
Sandwell	87	65
Solihull	146	40
Walsall	96	65
Wolverhampton	155	58
Mersey RHA	1,005	502
Chester	115	38
Crewe	83	37
Halton	18	29
Macclesfield	60	33
Warrington	82	37
Liverpool	224	113
St. Helens and Knowsley	129	74
Southport and Formby	36	27
South Sefton	103	44
Wirral	155	70
North Western RHA	1,962	1,173
Lancaster	53	37
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	93	88
Preston	104	42
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	136	83
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	127	70
West Lancashire	46	36
Chorley and South Ribble	44	55
Bolton	151	86
Bury	69	45
North Manchester	91	54
Central Manchester	133	40
South Manchester	157	50
Oldham	105	68
Rochdale	98	57
Salford	135	60
Stockport	113	84
Tameside and Glossop	105	58
Trafford	68	64
Wigan	135	96

Source: DHSS Annual Census of NHS Non-Medical Manpower.

[1] Figures independently rounded to nearest whole time equivalent.

[2] Includes Agency Midwifery Staff; excludes midwifery students.

[3] Includes health visitors in both the community and school health services, HV fieldwork teachers, TB visitors with HV certificates, dual/triple posts and bank health visitors. Excludes HV students.

[4] Includes London Post-Graduate Special Health Authorities' Staff.

[5] No further breakdown is available from RHA.

Table 2

Total Births (live and still) by RHA and England 1986

	1986
England	626,946
Northern RHA	40,462
Yorkshire RHA	48,601
Trent RHA	59,608
East Anglian RHA	24,703
North West Thames RHA	48,354
North East Thames RHA	53,242
South East Thames RHA	47,819
South West Thames RHA	36,905
Wessex RHA	35,959
Oxford RHA	33,348
South Western RHA	38,331

	1986
West Midlands RHA	70,833
Mersey RHA	32,892
North Western RHA	55,889

Source: OPCS Birth registrations.

Table 3
Health Visiting: Regional Health Authorties
Home visits (First visit in calendar year)

Numbers *1986*

	First visits (all ages)
England	4,129,365
Northern	265,491
Yorkshire	360,657
Trent	388,494
East Anglia	166,011
North West Thames	336,924
North East Thames	308,203
South East Thames	313,554
South West Thames	267,258
Wessex	236,346
Oxford	194,099
South Western	256,889
West Midlands	490,764
Mersey	166,087
North Western	378,588

Source: LHS 27/3 DHSS Statistics Division
Notes:
(1) A visit includes each occasion when professional help or advice is given by health visiting staff.
(2) The "first visit" refers to the first visit received by a person from any member of the health visiting staff during the calendar year for any problem.
(3) Visits to households where there is tuberculosis or other infectious diseases or visits by school health visitors are not included in the table.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the numbers of midwives and health visitors *(a)* in post and *(b)* in training for the years 1985, 1986 and 1987.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 1 February 1988]:* The information requested for September 1985 and September 1986 is given in the table. Similar information for 1987 is not yet available.

NHS Midwives and Health Visitors in Post—England at 30 September Whole Time Equivalents[1]

	1985	1986
Qualified Staff		
Midwives[2 3]	18,690	19,150
Health Visitors[4]	10,280	10,430
Trainees		
Student Midwives	4,380	4,180
Health Visitor Students	870	830

Source: DHSS Annual Census of NHS Non-Medical Manpower.
[1] Figures independently rounded to nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents.
[2] Includes agency staff.
[3] Includes staff in the Hospital and community services.
[4] Includes Health Visitors in community and school health services, Health Visitor Field Work Teachers, TB visitors with Health Visitor certificate, holders of Dual/Triple posts (Health Visitor/District Nurse/Midwife) and Bank Health Visitors.

Income Support

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has made any assessment of the effects on the discharge of long-stay mental hospital patients under the care in the community programme by the withholding of higher level supplementary benefit from such patients.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 15 March 1988]:* The income support that will be available to patients discharged from a mental illness or mental handicap hospital after a long stay, subsequent to 11 April, will depend on their individual needs and situation. Some will qualify for the disability premium, and some for the severe disability premium. We do not have information about the individual situations of people who may be discharged from long-stay in-patient care in the near future.

Health Authorities (Expenditure)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of the £109 million cost of the regional health authorities and £325 millon cost of the district regional health authorities and special health authorities is spent directly on patient care in a hospital ward, clinic or surgery, as shown in the draft March 1987 Health Service accounts.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 15 March 1988]:* The sums quoted include the headquarters costs of vital management and support functions such as finance, planning, supplies procurement, personnel, computer services, etc., which help to ensure the provision of patient treatment services at hospital and unit level.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if the £630 million cost of administration, general managers and medical record-keeping shown in the March 1987 draft Health Service accounts for England, hospital services, is in addition to the administrative costs of the districts and regions.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 15 March 1988]:* Yes. This operational expenditure at hospital level includes medical records (that is the administration of patients' clinical records) and secretarial and clerical support within hospital wards, diagnostic and treatment departments, accident and emergency and outpatient departments, and so on, without which patient treatment could not be carried out.

Nurses

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the establishment figures, *(b)* the funded establishment figures and *(c)* the in-post figures of each regional health authority in England for the following nursing grades: regional nursing officer 1 and 2, regional nurse 1 and 2, district nursng officer grades 1 to 7, director of nursing service grades 1 + to 6, senior nurse grades 1 + to 8, sister I; sister II, health visitor, deputy nursing sister, staff nurse, senior enrolled nurse, enrolled nurse and nursing auxiliary/assistant; and if he will publish, for each grade category, the number of employees in full-time posts, the number of part-time employees and the whole-time equivalent of those part-time employees;

(2) if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the establishment figures, *(b)* the funded establishment figures and *(c)* the in-post figures of each special health authority in England for the top nursing posts and each nursing grade below that; and if he will publish, for each

grade category, the number of employees in full-time posts, the number of part-time employees and the whole-time equivalents of those part-time employees.

Mr. Tony Newton *[holding answer 30 March 1988]*: I regret that information on establishments is not collected centrally. The whole-time equivalent staff in post information for the grades requested is given in the table. Separate information for numbers of whole-time and part-time staff is not readily available to this depth of detail and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Nursing and Midwifery staff by specified grades[1]
(including agency) within regional health authorities and special health authorities at 30 September 1986
Whole-time equivalent[2]

	Northern	Yorkshire	Trent	East Anglia	North West Thames	North East Thames	South East Thames	South West Thames	Wessex	Oxford	South Western	West Midlands	Mersey	North Western	London post graduate special health authorities	England
Regional Nursing Officer 1 and 2	1	1		1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1		12
Regional Nurse 1 and 2	3	2	1	1	3	2	4	2	2	1	2	4	3	1		31
District Nursing Officer 1 to 7	10	13	10	6	10	17	15	9	5	8	6	18	8	12	1	148
Director of Nursing services 1 to 6[3]	56	78	74	35	74	78	61	62	58	47	34	105	51	92	19	924
Senior Nurse Grade 1 to 8	621	635	773	327	733	822	801	643	501	447	499	865	411	858	145	9,079
Sister I	48	95	51	42	136	109	53	52	97	36	114	127	64	62	19	1,102
Sister II	4,088	4,666	5,610	2,251	4,298	4,909	4,629	3,786	3,321	2,723	3,808	6,910	3,639	6,593	609	61,838
Health Visitor[4]	615	658	868	332	649	621	729	543	553	487	600	942	444	1,030	–	9,070
Deputy Nursing Sister	202	279	385	116	207	311	276	136	147	183	191	431	252	330	7	3,452
Staff Nurse; Senior Enrolled Nurse	5,764	5,985	7,419	3,467	7,047	7,783	7,302	5,652	5,162	4,078	6,020	7,764	3,758	7,181	1,963	86,343
Enrolled Nurse	5,613	5,873	7,034	2,603	4,762	5,930	5,339	3,850	3,381	2,498	4,487	7,624	4,596	6,972	955	71,515
Nursing Auxiliary/Assistant	5,776	6,682	8,924	3,856	5,214	6,104	5,902	5,508	6,418	3,926	7,210	9,992	5,456	8,503	459	89,928
Total of above	22,797	24,966	31,148	13,036	23,135	26,685	25,110	20,244	19,645	14,434	22,971	34,782	18,680	31,634	4,177	333,443
Others[5]	4,591	5,326	5,975	2,558	5,538	7,650	5,259	4,108	3,416	2,512	4,005	7,734	36,48	6,221	707	69,248
Grand Total	27,388	30,292	37,122	15,593	28,672	34,336	30,369	24,352	23,061	16,946	26,976	42,516	22,328	37,855	4,883	402,690

Source: DHSS(SR7) Annual census of NHS Non-Medical Manpower.

[1] Identified as staff paid on the appropriate payscales. Some staff may therefore be paid on a particular payscale but are not necessarily working in a post indicated by that payscale. There might be small discrepancies between these figures and similar ones given previously.

[2] Figures are independently rounded to nearest whole time equivalent.

[3] Includes top nursing posts in Special Health Authorities.

[4] Includes all staff paid on Health Visitor payscale, in the Community and School Health Services.

[5] Includes all Tutorial staff, all student and pupil nurses, nursing cadets, nursery nurses, nursing staff employed in day nurseries and a small number of senior nursing staff in obsolete grades.

Committee on Safety of Medicines

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the current sub-committees of the Committee on Safety of Medicines, giving the names and professional background of each of their members.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 31 March 1988]*: The information requested is as follows:

Members of the Safety, Efficacy and Adverse Reactions Sub-committee

Members	*Professional background*
Professor K. G. M. M. Alberti, MA, D. Phil, MRCP, MRCPath	Professor of Medicine, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Dr. L. Beeley, MA (Oxon), FRCP	Consultant Clinical Pharmacologist, The Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham
Professor A. T. Birmingham, BSc, MB, BS (London)	Professor of Pharmacology, Nottingham University
Professor A. M. Breckenridge, MD, MSC, FRCP	Professor of Clinical Pharmacology, Liverpool University
Dr. C. J. Bulpitt, MSc, MD, MRCP, MRCS	Reader in Pharmaco-Epidemiology, Hammersmith Hospital, London
Dr. R. L. Carter, MA, DM, DSc, FRCPath	Reader in Pathology and Consultant Pathologist, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London
Dr. J. Davidson, MB, BS, FRCGP	General Practitioner, Cardiff
Professor D. S. Davies, BSc, PhD, C. Chem, FRSC	Professor of Biochemical Pharmacology, Hammersmith Hospital, London
Dr. R. Finch, FRCP, MRCPath	Consultant Physician and Senior Lecturer in Microbiology, City Hospital, Nottingham
Dr. E. S. Harpur, BSc, PhD, MPS	Lecturer in Physiology and Pharmacology, University of Aston, Birmingham
Dr. D. Jones, BA, MSC, PhD	Senior Lecturer in Epidemiology, St. Georges Hospital Medical School, London
Dr. B. J. Kirby, MB, ChB, FRCP	Deputy Director, Post Graduate Medical School, Exeter University
Professor M. J. S. Langman, BSc, MD, MBBS, FRCP	Professor of Medicine, University of Birmingham

Members	Professional background
Dr. A. V. P. Mackay, PhD, MA, BSc, MRCP	Macintosh Lecturer in Psychological Medicine, Glasgow University
Professor J. Malpas, D. Phil, FRCP, FRCR	Director, Department of Medical Oncology, St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London
Professor A. E. M. McLean, BM, PhD, FRCPath	Professor of Toxicology, University College Hospital, London
Professor W. S. Nimmo, BSc, MD, FRCP, FFARCS	Head of Department of Anaesthesia, University of Sheffield
Professor M. D. Rawlins, BSc, MD, FRCP (London), FRCP (Edinburgh)	Professor of Clinical Pharmacology, University of Newcastle
Professor C. G. Swift, PhD, MRCP	Professor of Health Care of the Elderly, King's College School of Medicine, London

Members of the Biologicals Sub-committee

Members	Professional background
Professor J. E. Banatvala, MD, MA, FRCPath, DPH, DCH	Professor of Clinical Virology, St. Thomas' Hospital Medical School, London
Professor W. J. Brammar, PhD, BSc	Professor of Biochemistry, Leicester University
Professor J. G. Collee, MD, FRCP, FRCPath	Professor of Bacteriology, University of Edinburgh
Professor H. Keen, MD, FRCP	Professor of Human Metabolism, Guy's Hospital Medical School, London
Dr. R. S. Lane, MD, MRCP, FRCPath	Director, Blood Products Laboratory, Elstree, Hertfordshire
Professor A. McMichael, PhD, CMAA, MRCP	Professor of Clinical Medicine, John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford
Professor J. Melling, BSc, MSc, PhD, FIBiol, FPS	Director of Vaccine Research and Production Laboratories, Porton Down, Salisbury
Professor E. R. Moxon, MB, BChir, FRCP	Professor of Paediatrics, John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford
Dr. R. J. Perry, BSc, PhD, MRSC, CChem	Director, Scottish National Blood Transfusion Centre, Edinburgh
Dr. G. Schild, BSc, PhD, FIBiol	Director of National Institute of Biological Standards and Control
Dr. D. P. Thomas, DPhil, MD, FRCPath	Head, Division of Blood Products, National Institute of Biological Standards and Control
Dr. E. G. B. Tuddenham, MD, FRCP, FRCPath	Director of Haemostasis Research Group, Department of Clinical Sciences, Clinical Research Centre
Dr. D. A. J. Tyrrell, CBE, MD, DSc, FRCP, FRCPath, FRS	Director of MRC Common Cold Unit, Harvard Hospital, Salisbury

Members of the Chemistry, Pharmacy and Standards Sub-committee

Members	Professional background
Dr. M. C. Allwood, B Pharm, PhD, MPS	Principal Pharmacist, Addenbrook's Hospital, Cambridge
Professor B. W. Barry, BSc, PhD, MPS, C. Chem, FRIC	Professor of Pharmaceutical Technology, University of Bradford
Professor J. R. Brown, MSc, PhD, MPS, C. Chem, FRSC, MI Biol	Head of Department of Pharmaceutical Chemistry, Sunderland Polytechnic
Dr. D. H. Calam, MA Phil, C. Chem, FRSC	Head of Chemistry and Antibiotics, National Institute of Biological Standards and Control
Dr. R. T. Calvert, BSc, PhD, MPS	District Pharmaceutical Officer, General Infirmary, Leeds
Professor J. E. Carless, B Pharm, MSC, PhD, FPS	Emeritus Professor of Pharmaceutics, University of London
Dr. A. G. Davidson, BSc, PhD, MPS	Lecturer in Pharmacy, Senior Lecturer in Pharmaceutical Chemistry, University of Strathclyde
Dr. D. J. Davies, MSc, PhD, MPS	Reader in Pharmaceutical Microbiology, University of Bath
Professor P. H. Elworthy, B Pharm, PhD, DSc, MSc, C. Chem, MRSC	Emeritus Professor of Pharmacy University of Manchester, Visiting Professor in Pharmaceutics, King's College, London and School of Pharmacy, London
Professor F. Fish, B Pharm, PhD, FPS	Dean of School of Pharmacy, University of London
Professor A. T. Florence, BSc, PhD, Chem, FRSC, MPS	Professor of Pharmaceutics, University of Strathclyde
Professor, I W. Kellaway, B Pharm, PhD, MPS	Professor of Pharmaceutics, UWIST, Cardiff
Professor D. W. Mathieson, PhD, BSc, C. Chem, FRSC	Emeritus Professor of Pharmaceutical Chemistry, University of Bradford
Professor J. M. Newton, B Pharm, PhD, FPS	Head of Department of Pharmacy, University of London
Mr G. F. Phillips, MSc, C. Chem, FRSC	Superintendent, Health Services Division, Laboratory of the Government Chemist, London
Dr. A. E. Theobald, B Pharm, PhD, MPS	Chelsea Department of Pharmacy, King's College, London

Members of the Adverse Reactions to Vaccines and Immunological Products Sub-committee

Members	*Professional background*
Professor J. E. Banatvala, MD, MA, FRCPath, DPH, DCH	Professor of Clinical Virology, St. Thomas' Hospital Medical School, London
Professor A. M. Breckenridge, MD, MSC, FRCP	Professor of Clinical Pharmacology, Liverpool University
Dr. J. Cameron-Bowie, MRCP, MFCM	Director of Community Medicine, Somerset Health Authority
Dr. N. Cavanagh, MD, MRCP	Consultant Paediatric Neurologist, Cheyne Centre for Spastic Children, London
Professor J. G. Collee, MD, FRCP, FRCPath	Professor of Bacteriology, University of Edinburgh
Dr. P. E. M. Fine, VMD, PhD	Senior Lecturer, Ross Institute, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
Professor D. Hull, BSc, FRCP, D obst, RCOG, DCH	Professor of Child Health, University Hospital and Medical School, Nottingham
Dr. B. W. McGuiness, MD, FRCGP, D obst, RCOG, DCH, RCPS	General Practitioner, Frodsham, Cheshire
Professor S. R. Meadow, MA, FRCP, DCh	Professor of Paediatrics and Child Health, St. James University Hospital, Leeds
Professor D. Miller, MA, FRCP, FFCM, DPH, MD	Professor of Community Medicine, St. Mary's Hospital, London
Dr. E. Miller, MB, BS, BSc	Principal Microbiologist, Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre, London
Dr. D. Reid, MD, FRCP, FFCM, DPH	Director Communicable Diseases, Ruchill Hospital, Glasgow
Dr. S. Wallace, FRCP, D obst, RCOG	Consultant Paediatric Neurologist, University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff

Barnet Health Authority

Mr. Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the percentage increase in funding for the Barnet health authority in 1987-88 over 1986-87; and what were the separate percentage figures for *(a)* wages and salaries and so on part of this and *(b)* the remainder.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* Allocations to district health authorities are the responsibility of regional health authorities. I understand however that Barnet health authority was, subject to adjustments regarding minor transfers, allocated an estimated increase in funding of 9·95 per cent. between 1986-87 and 1987-88. Funds are not allocated for specific purposes and it is for the health authority to determine how the fund available to it should be spent. My hon. Friend may care to approach the chairman of Barnet health authority for more detailed information.

Cervical Cancer Screening

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the pathology laboratories which process smears resulting from the implementation of a computerised call and recall cervical cancer screening programme; if he will list the funded establishment for each of those laboratories; if he will list the total numbers of staff in post; and what arrangements have been made to recruit extra staff to deal with the increased work load generated by the implementation of this programme.

Mrs. Currie: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) on 23 February at columns *183-6* which listed NHS laboratories in England that dealt with cervical cancer smear tests. Information on the funded establishment for each laboratory is not collected centrally. Information for non-NHS laboratories is not available.

The total number of trained staff reported by NHS laboratories in England as being in post on 31 December 1986 (the latest date for which figures are available) was as follows:

Staff	*Number employed whole-time on cervical cytology*	*Staff employed part-time on cervical cytology*	
		Number	*Whole-time equivalent*
Pathologists and other medically qualified staff	19	294	67·96
Medical Laboratory Scientific Officers, scientific officers and laboratory cytology screeners	289	900	488·82

Where necessary, laboratories have been recruiting additional staff. The figures above represent a 12 per cent. increase in whole-time equivalent staff employed on cervical cytology over the preceding year end. Increasing the number of staff is only one of the ways in which health authorities can improve the throughput of smear tests and avoid backlogs. Health authorities may also use other laboratories including those in the private sector.

NHS (Growth)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) following the announcement of additional money to the National Health Service on 16 December 1987, what he now expects the real growth in National Health Service resources to be during the current year;

(2) if he will detail the calculations supporting his statement, *Official Report*, 16 December 1987, column *1102*, that National Health Service expenditure will grow by 3 per cent. in 1988-89.

Mr. Newton *[pursuant to his reply, 22 March 1988, c. 88]*: I regret that my earlier reply to the hon. Member contained an error. The reference to a forecast of general inflation of 4·25 per cent. for 1988-89 should have read 4·5 per cent. This does not affect the rest of my reply.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 14 April 1988

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

National Union of Students

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what subjects he discussed at his last meeting with representatives of the National Union of Students.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend has had no recent meeting with the National Union of Students. I met officers of the National Union of Students on 29 February at their request to listen to their views on the question of National Union of Students membership raised by early-day motion 449.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Companies' Accounts (Registration)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Attorney-General if he has communicated with the Director of Public Prosecutions regarding the prosecution of any company for failure to register their accounts.

The Attorney-General: I have not done so. Ordinarily, prosecutions for such offences are brought by my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Courts (Televising of Proceedings)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Attorney-General what consideration is being given to the televising of proceedings in British courts; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: There are at present no plans to televise proceedings in courts in England and Wales.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Crime Prevention

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the latest evidence of the impact of crime prevention schemes.

Mr. John Patten: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) on 14 March 1988 at column *420*.

Interpol

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last visited Interpol; and what assessment he made of its present operation.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend has not visited the Interpol General Secretariat, but the Government have no doubt that Interpol plays an essential part in international police co-operation.

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much the United Kingdom has contributed to Interpol for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom's membership subscription to Interpol in each of the last 10 years has been as follows:

	£
1987	440,487
1986	322,416
1985	251,266
1984	251,047
1983	279,416
1982	259,000
1981	211,516
1980	232,285
1979	179,496
1978	184,669

Psychiatric Patients

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward legislation to give full voting rights to all patients in psychiatric hospitals.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. A voluntary patient in a psychiatric hospital is already entitled to vote in all elections provided he is included in a register of electors. He may register as an elector in respect of any address with which he has been associated apart from that of the psychiatric hospital itself. He may choose to vote in person or to apply to vote by post or by proxy. These provisions do not apply to a patient detained under an enactment relating to persons suffering from mental disorder. We have no plans to change these arrangements.

Prisons (Wales)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he is considering building any new prisons in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The forward building programme includes a new prison at Wrexham.

Recommendations have been made in a study commissioned by Clwyd county council into possible sites for prisons across the county as a whole. These will be assessed alongside other possible sites which have been identified in the north-west of England.

No other Welsh sites are at the moment being considered or are in the programme.

Drug Misuse

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last attended a meeting of the Pompidou Group on Drug Misuse; and what plans were discussed for co-operation with similar groups elsewhere, such as the Andean Parliamentary Drugs Commission.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Pompidou Group Ministers meet every two or three years to set a programme of work for officials to take forward. My right hon. Friend attended the most recent ministerial meeting which was held in London in January 1987 under the chairmanship of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), then Minister of State, Home Office.

There is no formal arrangement for co-operation between the Pompidou Group and the Andean

Parliamentary Drugs Commission. There are, however, frequent exchanges of views between representatives of the Group's member states and their counterparts from similar regional groupings elsewhere.

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is being done to improve working relations and co-operation between the Pompidou Group on Drug Misuse and each of those parts of the European Community Commission involved in drug misuse-related matters.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: With a view to developing a consistent European approach to drug-related problems, in 1986 the Pompidou Group invited the Commission to participate in its activities. A Commissioner attended its ministerial conference in January 1987, and Commission staff take part in its periodic meetings of officials and experts. It is for the Commission to decide upon its representation at such meetings.

Drug Trafficking

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what links have now been established between drug trafficking and illegal arms trading.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have no direct evidence in this country of such links, but remain alert to the possibility both at national level and in international discussions.

Michael Ryan (Shootings)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Thames Valley police as to how many of the persons *(a)* killed by and *(b)* injured by the late Michael Ryan were struck by bullets fired from (i) an M1 carbine, (ii) an AK56 rifle and (iii) a pistol; and how many were struck with bullets fired from more than one weapon.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable of Thames Valley police that none of Ryan's victims was struck by bullets from an M1 carbine. Of those who were killed, seven were struck by bullets from a 7·62 Kalashnikov rifle only; eight were struck by bullets from a pistol only; and one person was struck by bullets from a 7·62 Kalashnikov rifle and a pistol. Of those who were injured, one person was struck by bullets fired from a pistol, two were injured by glass or metal other than bullets and in the other 12 cases it is not known what weapon caused the injuries.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Thames Valley police as to the distance between the late Michael Ryan and each of his victims when they were injured or killed by him.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable of Thames Valley police that 12 of Ryan's victims were within 10 yd of him when they were killed or injured and the other 19 were over 10 yd away.

Conferences (Policing Costs)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Derbyshire of a breakdown of the costs for policing the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations Central Council held in Buxton on 18-19 March.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable of Derbyshire that he has notified the county treasurer that the additional costs of policing the meeting are £185,039. This covers police officer and civilian overtime, accommodation and subsistence for police officers, additional equipment, communications, transport, and aid from other forces provided under section 14 of the Police Act 1964.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional funds are being made available to the Derbyshire police authority to cover costs arising from policing the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations Central Council held in Buxton on 18-19 March.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Under the arrangements for police specific grant at 51 per cent., and for block grant, the Government contribute well over half the costs of policing in Derbyshire.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has obtained any estimate for additional policing costs projected for the 1988 Conservative party annual conference.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable of Sussex that the Sussex police authority has approved a budget of £1·4 million for the estimated additional cost of policing the Conservative party conference in October 1988. The Government meet a sizeable proportion of the costs of all policing in Sussex through normal police funding arrangements of police grant at 51 per cent. plus block grant.

Union Flag

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to prevent political parties from using the Union flag at demonstrations and conferences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No.

Traffic Wardens

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* the London boroughs within each of the areas listed in his reply of 31 March, *Official Report*, column *682*, in respect of traffic wardens.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information is as follows:

No. 1 Area (North):
Waltham Forest
Redbridge
Haringey
Enfield
Islington

No. 2 Area (East):
Hackney
Tower Hamlets
Havering
Barking and Dagenham
Newham

No. 3 Area (South East):

Southwark
Bromley
Greenwich
Lewisham
Bexley

No. 4 Area (South):
Lambeth
Merton
Croydon
Sutton

No. 5 Area (South West):
Richmond-upon-Thames
Hounslow
Kingston
Wandsworth

No. 6 Area (West):
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Hammersmith and Fulham
Ealing
Hillingdon

No. 7 Area (North West):
Camden
Harrow
Barnet
Brent

No. 8 Area (Central):
City of Westminster

Greater London Co-ordination Centre

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his reply of 31 March, *Official Report*, column *682*, if he will give details of any expert advice from outside his Department which caused him to reject the case for primary legislation made by the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority in order that the Greater London Co-ordination Centre could be maintained on a permanent basis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend took account of views which the Health and Safety Executive expressed to the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority. The views of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis were also taken into account. Additionally, my right hon. Friend consulted Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services.

Firearms (Police)

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of operations in which firearms were issued to police officers in England and Wales in 1987; in how many of those operations shots have been fired by police officers; how many police officers are currently qualified to carry firearms; and what were the equivalent figures for *(a)* 1986 and *(b)* 1983.

Mr. Hurd *[pursuant to his reply, 24 March 1988, c. 186]:* I regret that the reply was inaccurate. The correct reply is as follows:

The number of operations in England and Wales, against criminals or those known or believed to be armed, in which firearms were issued to police officers in 1987 was 2,185. This was 10·92 per cent. fewer than in 1986 and 31·29 per cent. fewer than in 1983. Police officers fired shots in seven, or 0·003 per cent., of those operations. The number of such operations in which shots were fired by police officers in the preceding four years was three in 1983; six in 1984; seven in 1985; and one in 1986. As at 31 December 1987 a total of 7,349 police officers in England and Wales were qualified to carry firearms. This was 12·46 per cent. fewer than at the end of 1986 and 43·66 per cent. fewer than at the end of 1983. The latest figure represents 5·99 per cent. of the total police strength in England and Wales.

WALES

Regional Health Authorities

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received calling for the abolition of the regional health authorities in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: None. There are no regional health authorities in Wales.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Housing Benefit

91. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his latest estimate of the saving to the Exchequer as a result of the changes in housing benefit this April.

Mr. Portillo: The changes save £650 million when compared with what the old scheme would have cost next year. This comprises £150 million in public expenditure and £500 million in rate rebates which are not classified as public expenditure.

Marginal Tax Rates

92. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate how many people will face marginal tax rates of over *(a)* 40 per cent., *(b)* 50 per cent., *(c)* 60 per cent. and *(d)* 70 per cent. as a result of the interaction of the tax and social security systems, in 1988-89.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Sir Rhys Williams) on 25 March at columns *243-46*. This gives the numbers of working heads with combined marginal tax and benefit withdrawal rates above 50 per cent.

We estimate that 45,000 families with children and 25,000 couples and single people without children have combined rates between 40 and 50 per cent.

Regional Secure Units

Mr. Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services which health district have secure hospital accommodation available within their own district.

Mrs. Currie: Central information indicates that at the end of 1986 the following district health authorities had secure accommodation in one or more of their mental-illness or mental-handicap hospitals and units. Latest available information relating to permanent regional secure units was provided in my reply to my hon. Friend on 12 April 1988 at columns *111-12*.

District health authorities listed by regional health authority

Northern RHA
East Cumbria
Durham
North West Durham
Northumberland
Gateshead
Newcastle

Yorkshire RHA
East Yorkshire
Scunthorpe
Wakefield

Trent RHA
Leicestershire
Doncaster
Rotherham

East Anglian RHA
Norwich

North West Thames RHA
South Bedfordshire
East Hertfordshire
North West Hertfordshire
South West Hertfordshire
Barnet
Ealing
Brent
Riverside

North East Thames RHA
Southend
Hampstead
Waltham Forest

South East Thames RHA
Eastbourne
Dartford and Gravesham
Maidstone
Bexley

South West Thames RHA
West Surrey and North East Hants
Mid Surrey
East Surrey
Chichester
Mid Downs
Croydon
Kingston and Esher
Wandsworth
Merton and Sutton

Wessex RHA
East Dorset
West Dorset
East Hampshire
Southampton and SW Hants
Salisbury
Swindon
Bath District

Oxford RHA
West Berkshire
Northampton

South Western RHA
Exeter
North Devon

West Midlands RHA
Bromsgrove and Redditch
Mid Staffordshire
North Staffordshire
South East Staffordshire
North Warwickshire
South Warwickshire
North Birmingham
Walsall

Mersey RHA
Crewe
Macclesfield
Warrington
St. Helens and Knowsley
Southport and Formby

North Western RHA
Lancaster
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale
North Manchester
Rochdale

Mentally Ill Patients

Mr. Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to the main difficulties experienced by other countries as a result of reducing hospital accommodation for the mentally ill and encouraging a shift to care in the community for these patients.

Mrs. Currie: There are four main lessons to be learnt from the experience of other countries in reducing hospital accommodation for mentally ill people and encouraging a shift to care in the community.

Major changes take time to implement effectively. Present changes are evolutionary and not revolutionary. A change towards less in-patient care and more care in other settings has been under way for many years in this country; some signs of this change can be traced back to the 1930s. The steady reduction in the number of patients resident in mental illness hospitals and units reflects that change and the development of new treatments and styles of care. The closure of some hospitals consequent to this changed pattern of care requires careful assessment of existing and likely future needs and reprovision of necessary services locally prior to closure. This is a process that should not normally be hurried.

Changes are brought about most effectively when planned jointly by all care agencies concerned, whether statutory or not, and should take account of the views of mental illness sufferers and their families. Changes are most effective when there is strong local commitment to making the change work.

Measures need to be taken to ensure that, as secondary mental health care staff move into the community, their main focus of activity continues to be those people who are severely disabled by mental illness. Some countries have reported an undue movement of staff-time towards dealing with people who, although suffering from mental distress, are not severely disabled at the expense of the more severely disabled. Ministers are very conscious of this potential problem and are keeping closely in touch with research on the subject.

Particular attention needs to be paid to ensuring that patients with longer-term disabilities who are being treated in the community are regularly reviewed and continuity of care ensured so far as possible.

Industrial Disablement Pension and Housing Benefit (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many individuals in the Nottingham, North area receive industrial disablement pension; how many of them currently receive housing benefit; and how many will lose part or all of that housing benefit from April.

Mr. Portillo: I regret that the information is not available.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people will *(a)* receive reduced housing benefit and *(b)* lose their entitlement to housing benefit in Houghton and Washington from April.

Mr. Portillo: I regret that the information is not available.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make it his policy to estimate by constituency the number of pensioners now receiving housing benefit who will lose rights after the change in the social security system in April.

Mr. Portillo: No. We hold no data that would enable us to do this on a constituency-by-constituency basis.

Benefits

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what investigations or inquiries he has made into the financial effects of his recent changes in social security benefits into the following categories of persons who were in receipt of supplementary benefit *(a)* widows with children of school age, *(b)* registered disabled persons under pensionable age and *(c)* mentally handicapped persons.

Mr. Scott: Overall estimates of the effects of the income-related benefit changes are contained in "Impact of the Reformed Structure of Income Related Benefits," published last October. It is not possible to break down these estimates further into the categories requested. Further information about the effects of the changes will become available in due course through our monitoring arrangments.

Vaccine Damage

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what criticisms were made to his Department regarding the validity of the conclusion of the National Childhood Encephalopathy Study that the risk of brain damage from whooping cough vaccination was approximately one in 300,000 doses of the vaccine.

Mrs. Currie: The National Childhood Encephalopathy Study's (NCES) estimate was that the number of previously normal children with evidence of persistent neurological damage one year after vaccination with the diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (DTP) vaccine was one in 310,000 injections.

The chief criticisms of the NCES conclusion were contained in a report prepared by Professor Gordon Stewart, which claimed that the NCES figure was an under-estimate. Professor Stewart's findings were fully considered by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), which advises the Health Departments on all aspects of immunisation. The JCVI and other authorities accepted the NCES conclusion as the best estimate available, and it is acknowledged in the 1983 edition of the memorandum, "Immunisation Against Infectious Disease."

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what internal material relating to whooping cough vaccination was made available to the defendants and plaintiffs in the whooping cough vaccination case; if his Department will discuss the decision of the court with corresponding departments in other countries with a statutory vaccine damage payments scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: As part of the proceedings in the case of Loveday *v.* Renton a summons for discovery was issued against the Department by the plaintiff's solicitors seeking an order to disclose certain categories of documents. An agreement was reached as to which documents should be disclosed and under what conditions. These conditions included undertakings by the plaintiff's solicitors in order to preserve the confidentiality of the documents and to prevent their use for any purposes other than the court proceedings.

We are currently considering the implications of the judgment in this case for the statutory scheme of payments under the Vaccine Damage Act 1979, and will make a further statement as soon as possible.

Melagenina

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide the necessary funding for testing the effectiveness of melagenina in the treatment of vitiligo.

Mr. Newton: No. Any medicinal product such as this lotion must be subject to a product licence before it may be marketed in the United Kingdom. Applicants for product licences need to supply sufficient data to the licensing authority to enable them to assess the products safety, quality and efficacy.

Control of Medicines (Report)

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what progress he has made in considering the Evans/Cunliffe report on the control of medicines which he published on 26 January.

Mr. Newton: Dr. Evans and Mr. Cunliffe found that

"the overall record of medicines control in the United Kingdom is a good one and its reputation stands deservedly high"

and concluded that the DHSS

"record in protecting the public without inhibiting therapeutic innovation and progress is second to none."

They also noted that the Department has

"handled the growing burden of licensing work with commendable increase in efficiency."

At the same time they made a number of criticisms of the organisation and working practices of the medicines division, and also commented on the room for improvement by the pharmaceutical industry in the submission of licence applications. They made 54 recommendations. We have consulted the Medicines Commission on key proposals and I can now set out the conclusions we have so far reached.

I accept Dr. Evans' and Mr. Cunliffe's recommendation that the responsibility for the control of medicines should remain in DHSS and that the Medicines Control Agency, as it will be known, should be under the charge of a single director. I also accept that the work of the agency should be organised in functional teams and that these should be supported by suitable information technology. The actual structure of the agency will not be determined until after the director has been appointed.

I accept in principle the recommendation that the whole cost of the agency should be met from licence fees and we will now discuss this with the trade associations. It will be necessary to establish arrangements to show the industry that the cost of the agency is no more than is required for the tasks it has to carry out. I do not, however, propose to accept the recommendations for a budget committee on which the industry would be represented. As Dr. Evans and Mr. Cunliffe pointed out, the Department must remain independent of the industry in carrying out its licensing work. It will more easily be seen to be so if, instead of setting up a committee on which both parties were represented, the Department arranged meetings with the industry as required to explain the basis for the levels of fees it proposed and to discuss the management performance of the agency. These arrangements will in no way impinge on the agency's independence of the industry in carrying out its responsibilities for controlling medicines.

The first priority must be to appoint the director and I am taking action to this end. My intention is that the main managerial and financial changes should be made well in time for the financial year 1989-90. In the meantime the Department is pursuing the other recommendations in the Evans-Cunliffe report.

I am grateful to Dr. Evans and Mr. Cunliffe for their report. I believe they have shown ways, in their words, "to make a good system better" and of enabling the Department to cope with further increases in licensing and other work on the control of medicines. Improvements in the management of the work will benefit patients and will further our objective of promoting investment by research-based pharmaceutical companies in this country.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

BBC External Services

Mr. Wells: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he is planning to take any action with regard to the licensing regulations which prevent the BBC external services from seeking additional funds from advertising or other sources.

Mr. Eggar: We have no plans to do so. It is open to the BBC to propose changes to the licence and agreement, but any change in the present funding arrangements of the BBC external services would require very careful consideration, particularly in relation to the BBC's editorial independence and the character of external services' broadcasts.

Gibraltar

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, in the light of statements made by the new Chief Minister of Gibraltar regarding negotiations on the future of Gibraltar, he will make a statement on the progress made so far in the discussions held between British and Spanish officials on the specific areas referred to in the Brussels declaration.

Mrs. Chalker: Following my right hon. and learned Friend's last meeting with the Spanish Foreign Minister, agreement was reached on joint declarations on Gibraltar airport, the proposed ferry service to Algeciras and the need to take steps to improve the flow of traffic by land between Gibraltar and Spain. Her Majesty's Government remain fully committed to the Brussels process.

Panama

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if any advice has been issued to British commercial undertakings in Panama in respect of payments of local fares and charges; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Our advice has not been sought by British commercial undertakings in Panama and none has been given.

Turkey (Prime Minister's Visit)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what additional costs were incurred by the British embassy in Turkey associated with the recent visit by the Prime Minister.

Mr. Eggar: Costs incurred by the British embassy in Ankara were £805.

Bangladesh

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Government of Bangladesh regarding the persecution of the tribal people in the Chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: We have on several occasions raised with the Bangladesh Government at the highest levels the concern felt in this country for human rights in Bangladesh. My noble Friend the Minister of State, the Lord Glenarthur, did so most recently with the Bangladesh high commission last month.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Textile and Clothing Exports

Mr. Haynes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if, in view of the challenge from China to United Kingdom textile and clothing industries, he will make it his policy to adopt a firm stance in the renegotiation of the European Economic Community/China textile agreement due to take place in the current year, and in particular to ensure that China is treated no more favourably than other dominant suppliers.

Mr. Atkins: Preparations for the renegotiation of the EC/China bilateral textiles agreement later this year are at an early stage. My Department is in touch with the United Kingdom textile and clothing industry to obtain its views on United Kingdom priorities for the negotiations, and these will be taken into account when we consider the stance to adopt in the European Community's preparatory discussions. Our position will, of course, recognise the significant place which China now holds as a textile and clothing supplier to the Community market, as well as other relevant factors; for example, the fact that it is a state-trading economy and also a developing country.

Restrictive Practices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list all industries and professions which have been the subject of a referral by the Government to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, as part of the process to eliminate restrictive practices, since 1979.

Mr. Maude: Agreements subject to the Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976 are not referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, but are registered by the Director General of Fair Trading, who may refer them to the Restrictive Practices Court.

The Fair Trading Act 1973 gives both the Director General of Fair Trading and Ministers powers to make monopoly references to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Ministers may also make general references under section 78 of the 1973 Act, and references as to restrictive labour practices under section 79 of that Act. The Competition Act 1980 gives the Director General of Fair Trading powers to refer anti-competitive practices. A list of all such references made to the commission since the beginning of 1979 is as follows:

Monopoly references under the Fair Trading Act 1973

Full title of reference	*Year of reference*
Supply of Tampons	1979
Full line forcing and tie-in sales	1979
Supply of Liquefied Petroleum Gas	1979
Inner London Letter Post	1979
Supply of Concrete Roofing Tiles	1979
Supply of Ready-Mixed Concrete	1979
Wholesale Supply of Motor Car Parts	1980
Supply of Films for Exhibition in Cinemas	1980
Supply of Pitches for Holiday Caravans in Northern Ireland	1981

Full title of reference	*Year of reference*
Supply of Contraceptive Sheaths	1981
Supply of Animal Waste	1982
Supply of White Salt	1983
Supply, maintenance and repair of Postal Franking Machines	1983
Supply of Tampons	1984
Supply of agency services by travel agents for tour operators in relation to the marketing and supply of foreign package holidays	1984
Supply of the services of managing greyhound tracks	1984
Supply of Steel Wire Fencing	1984
Supply of Marine Radio Navigation Receivers	1985
Supply of Pest Control Services	1986
Supply of Beer	1986
Supply of the services of advertising in magazines for Campers, Climbers and Walkers	1987
Supply of Credit Card Services	1987
Supply of Codeine	1987
Supply of Gas to Contract Customers	1987
Supply of Artificial Lower Limbs	1987
Advertising rules of Osteopaths	1988
Advertising rules of Civil Engineers	1988
Reference under Section 78 of the 1973 Act	
Broadcasting and Public Performance Rights in Sound Recordings	1988
Reference under Section 79 of the 1973 Act	
Restrictive Labour Practices in Television and Film Making	1988
Anti-competitive practice references under the Competition Act 1980	
TI Raleigh Bicycles	1981
Sheffield Newspapers Ltd.	1981
London Electricity Board	1982
Ford Motor Company	1984
British Broadcasting Corporation and Independent Television Publication Ltd.	1985

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list all those professions currently under examination by the Government as part of the process to eliminate restrictive practices.

Mr. Maude: The Director General of Fair Trading has a statutory duty to keep commercial activities under review, and this includes the behaviour of the professions. The Government, in developing their policies, give a high priority to competition. We have also stated in the recent Green Paper, "Review of Restrictive Trade Practices Policy", (Cm. 331) that exemptions from the current restrictive trade practices legislation, including those for professional services, will not be automatically carried across into the new legislation, but will have to be justified afresh.

Steelworkers

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what further representations have been made to the EEC Commission regarding outstanding payments of iron and steel European readoption and benefit scheme benefits due to Sheffield steelworkers made redundant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My officials have made a number of further representations at a senior level, and have made the Commission well aware of the consequences which its delay is having on applicants under the iron and steel European readoption and benefit scheme. Regrettably the Commission has still to take a decision on outstanding applications for approval of aid under the treaty of Paris.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Community Education Council

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make a statement on his planned changes to the remit of the Scottish Community Education Council;

(2) if he will make a statement on the future role and level of grant of the Scottish Community Education Council.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The council was set up in 1982 with the remit of advising the Secretary of State on all matters concerned with community education and promoting the development of community education.

After six years it is appropriate to review this remit, and I have concluded that there will be less need in future for the exercise of the council's advisory function. On the other hand, there is scope for developing its function as a resource centre, with the aim of recovering a higher proportion of production costs from income other than grant.

The new council which takes office in April will oversee this redirection of effort and deal with the practical implications. I have accordingly decided to make available to the council grant at last year's rate for the period 1 April to 30 June (£141,600) so that it can assess the position. Future levels of grant will be determined in the light of the council's needs, having regard to its new remit and its corporate plan.

Education Reform

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to introduce legislation to allow schools to opt out of the state education system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government have made it clear that there will be no proposals for opting out in the current session. The School Boards (Scotland) Bill, which was introduced on 16 March, contains no such provisions, and we do not anticipate any change to the Bill for this purpose.

The Government have also consistently made clear that we do not rule out provisions for opting out in future. However, no decisions have yet been taken about future legislation.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list in the *Official Report* the total amount of grant allocated by his Department to the Scottish Community Education Council in each of the past five years;

(2) when he expects to announce the total Scottish Office grant to be allocated to the Scottish Community Education Council in the financial year 1988-89.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Grant paid by the Scottish Education Department to the Scottish Community Education Council has been as follows:

	£
1983-84	334,000
1984-85	346,350
1985-86	356,000
1986-87	542,000
1987-88	566,000

As to grant for 1988-89, I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave on 12 April to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood).

Cancer Screening

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the present arrangements for publicising the case for patients to undergo cancer screening in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Cervical cancer screening in Scotland is presently mainly undertaken as part of the normal medical care of women attending ante-natal clinics, post-natal clinics and family planning and well women clinics. A substantial proportion of all tests are carried out by general practitioners some of whom operate a call/recall system for their own patients. Women are advised about the test by general medical practitioners or other professional staff.

I announced on 10 December 1987 that a comprehensive cervical cancer screening service is to be made available to all women in Scotland between 20 and 60 years and the Scottish Health Education Group will mount a suitable publicity campaign at the appropriate time.

I also announced on 20 October 1987 our intention to establish centres throughout Scotland to provide a comprehensive nationwide breast cancer screening programme for all women between 50 and 64 years by 1991. The first four centres, in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee, will come into operation during the course of this year. Again SHEG will be preparing publicity material for this programme.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Housing Executive

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the capital and revenue expenditure by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in each of the years since its inception.

Mr. Needham: The capital and revenue expenditure by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in each financial year since 1972-73 is as follows:

	Capital £ million	*Revenue £ million*	*Gross Total £ million*
1972-73	28·5	27·0	55·5
1973-74	64·4	34·0	98·4
1974-75	44·9	53·4	98·3
1975-76	70·8	66·4	137·2
1976-77	106·8	87·8	194·6
1977-78	109·6	105·4	215·0
1978-79	102·8	133·8	236·6
1979-80	97·5	171·3	268·8
1980-81	110·7	199·2	309·9
1981-82	119·9	241·0	360·9
1982-83	177·4	248·4	425·8
1983-84	177·2	269·4	446·6
1984-85	174·2	308·6	482·8
1985-86	171·9	327·9	499·8
1986-87	151·3	341·2	492·5
1987-88[1]	149·8	349·8	499·6

[1] Provisional

Generating Capacity

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when a decision will be taken on the next phase of generating capacity in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: It is not possible to give a firm date for decisions on new generating capacity. The Government are currently considering revised proposals from Northern Ireland Electricity and Antrim Power Company Limited and will take decisions as soon as possible.

Police Stations (Repairs)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list the police stations which have needed rebuilding or major repairs after bomb damage in each year since 1979, indicating the cost, when work began and when it was completed or ceased due to Irish Republican Army threats, and which stations which were damaged do not at present have work in hand to repair them;

(2) on which new police stations in Northern Ireland work was brought to a halt by Irish Republican Army threats during each year since 1979; if he will indicate when work *(a)* ceased, and *(b)* restarted; what was the contract price for each station; what were the sums paid for work actually carried out; and when he now expects the work to be completed, together with the completion cost.

Mr. Stanley *[holding answer 12 April . 81]:* The information is as follows:

RUC stations seriously damaged by bomb and mortar explosions and whether reinstated

Year and Stations seriously damaged	*Whether reinstated*
1979 Kinawley	Yes
Newtonhamilton	Yes
1980 Plumbridge	Yes
Clogher	Yes
Warrenpoint	Yes
1981 Clogher	Yes
Newtonhamilton	Yes
Rosslea	Yes
1982 Woodbourne	Yes
1983 Andersontown	Yes
Carrickmore	Yes
1984 Kinawley	Yes
1985 Newry	Yes
Plumbridge	Yes
Enniskillen	Yes
Ballinamallard	Yes
Toomebridge	Yes
Ballygawley	Yes
Castlederg	Yes
Carrickmore	Yes
Shantallow	Yes
Tynan	No
1986 Coalisland	Yes
Cloughmills	Yes
Birches	No
Lisburn Road	No
1987 Newtonstewart	Yes
Kinawley	Yes

	Year and Stations seriously damaged	Whether reinstated
	Loughgall	Yes
1988	Dunmurry	Yes

The Police Authority has not yet taken a final decision on the reinstatement of Tynan, Birches and Lisburn road. It would not be in the public interest to disclose the cost of reinstating individual stations, details of future plans for specific sites or the estent to which work has or has not been interrupted by IRA threats.

TRANSPORT

A19 (Litter)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department takes to ensure the efficient removal of litter from the A19 between Middlesbrough and Sunderland.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The requirements of the Department for routine maintenance of the A19 trunk road is contained within the Department's document, "Code of Practice for Routine Maintenance".

The section of the A19 between Middlesbrough and Sunderland is maintained on behalf of the Department by three agent authorities: Sunderland metropolitan borough council, Durham county council and Cleveland county council. They have all been seen to be observing the code as far as the question of litter is concerned.

In accordance with general policy, litter receptacles are not provided in the lay-bys on the A19. The public are advised to take litter home. This general policy appears to work well. There is no evidence of significant dumping. The Department arranges for litter clearance where it may be seen there is a hazard or nuisance. Particular problems are dealt with subsequent to reports from several sources, including our agent authorities, the police, motoring organisations and the travelling public.

The code requirements adopted by the Department's maintaining agent authorities and district councils as appropriate on the A19 trunk road, include:

(a) sweeping the trunk road annually;
(b) removing hazardous material, litter and debris as soon as possible as reported by routine maintenance personnel, the police, motoring organisations and the public; and
(c) scavenging and cleaning of lay-bys and the removal of wind-blown litter and abandoned cars, if necessary, by district councils supplemented by reports from several and obvious sources.

The Department's regional office staff are aware of the conditions on the A19 trunk road and react to circumstances as necessary.

Bus Lanes (London)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has of the number of bus lanes installed and removed in London since 31 March 1986.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I understand that six new bus lanes have been or are in the process of being installed in London since 1 April 1986 and that five have been or are being removed. A copy of the Department's recent advice note on bus lanes is available in the Library—I shall send the hon. Member a copy.

Motorway Accidents

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list motorway injury accidents under each of the following categories: (i) total number, (ii) vehicle types involved, (iii) by weather conditions and time of day, (iv) whether there was motorway lighting and (v) by age of drivers.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Road accident statistics for Great Britain are published annually by the Department, the latest full figures available are for 1986, as follows:

(i) Motorway injury accidents

	Number
Fatal	202
Serious	1,093
Slight	3,867
Total	5,162

(ii) Number and type of vehicle involved in motorway injury accidents:

	Number
Mopeds and scooters	25
Motorcycles	296
Cars	8,176
Buses and coaches	84
LGVs	714
HGVs	1,531
Others	67
Total	10,893

(iii) Motorway injury accidents by weather conditions and time of day:

	Number
Fine	3,975
Raining	910
Snowing	115
Fog	93
Daylight	3,550
Darkness	1,612

(iv) Whether there was motorway lighting:

	Daylight	Darkness
Lit section	1,755	721
Unlit section	1,795	891
Total	3,500	1,612

(v) Age distribution of drivers involved in accidents on motorways:

	Per cent.
18 to 30 years	35
30 to 40 years	25
40 to 50 years	21
50 to 60 years	12
60 to 70 years	5
Over 70 years	2

Speedboat Accident (Looe)

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will hold a public inquiry into the circumstances of the speedboat accident off Looe on Tuesday 5 April; and if he will make a statement on the

alleged delay between the official notification of Her Majesty's coastguards, Brixham and the calling out of the Fowey lifeboat.

Mr. David Mitchell: I learnt with regret of this accident in which two young men lost their lives. I have made arrangements for one of my Department's surveyors to investigate and report on the circumstances of the accident. I cannot comment further until I have received the report.

ENERGY

Uranium Supplies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has received any recent communication from the European Economic Community Energy Commissioner rgarding the current appraisal by EURATOM of the adequacy of the uranium supply agreements or contracts with non-European Economic Community member states, including Australia, Canada, the United States of America, Namibia and South Africa.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No. The only such assessment of which I am aware is that regularly contained in the annual report of the Euratom Supply Agency. I have arranged for a copy of the 1987 report to be placed in the Library of the House when published.

Nuclear Power (Exhibition)

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to nuclear power to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the Authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall on Wednesday 3 May.

IAEA (Operational Safety and Review Team)

Mr. Sackville: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when and where the International Atomic Energy Association's operational safety and review team mission to the United Kingdom will take place.

Mr. Parkinson: At the IAEA general conference last September, I invited the agency to send an OSART team to visit one of our nuclear power stations.

The CEGB has now offered Oldbury for the OSART visit, which is planned for the summer of 1989.

PRIME MINISTER

Harland and Wolff Shipyard

Q36. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will pay a visit to Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Scotland

Q65. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Prime Minister when she next intends to pay an official visit to Scotland.

The Prime Minister: I visited Scotland on 30 March.

Ryton-on-Dunsmore

Q110. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to make an official visit to Ryton-on-Dunsmore, near Rugby.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Engagements

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 14 April.

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 14 April.

Mr. Cran: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 14 April.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 14 April.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 14 April.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 14 April.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 14 April.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 14 April.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 14 April.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Canada and United States of America (Official Visit)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to her reply of 22 October, *Official Report*, column *847*, if she will now provide a breakdown by category of the cost to public funds of her visit to Canada and the United States of America.

The Prime Minister: Bills for some of the costs of this visit have not yet been received. The total cost to date is £83,564, which can be broken down as follows:

	Total to date
Travel costs:	£74,404
Other costs:	£9,160

Turkey (Official Visit)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total cost of her visit to Turkey; how many officials accompanied her; what was her method of travel; and who was the carrier.

The Prime Minister: Final figures for the cost of my visit are not yet available. An estimate of the total cost is £24,000. I was accompanied by three officials and nine support staff. I flew by RAF VC10.

Official Entertainment (Cost)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total cost of official entertainment associated with the Office of the Prime Minister in 1987-88.

The Prime Minister: Final figures for 1987-88 are not yet available. The latest estimate of the total cost is £9,739.

Official Residences (Costs)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister if she will provide the final figure for 1987-88 for *(a)* the cost of maintaining and running 10 Downing street and additional costs at Chequers, *(b)* the grant-in-aid to the Chequers Trust and *(c)* the costs on a consistent basis and expressed at constant 1984-85 prices.

The Prime Minister: Final figures for 1987-88 are not yet available. The latest estimates of the figures requested are:

	£
(a) cost of maintaining and running 10 Downing street and additional costs at Chequers[1 2 3]	5,278,618
(b) the grant-in-aid to the Chequers Trust	224,000
(c) figures at *(a)* and *(b)* in 1984-85 price terms[4]	*(a)* 4,593,956 *(b)* 194,946

Notes:

[1] The figures include costs at both 10 Downing street and Chequers; the information is not available by location.

[2] Salaries and wages, notional pension liability, administration costs, the costs of office services and the grant-in-aid to the Chequers Trust are included. The salary of the Prime Minister is excluded.

[3] This total is calculated on a consistent basis with the total for 1986-87 given in sub-paragraph *(a)* of the reply to the hon. Member on 23 October 1987, at column *846*. If office services costs are excluded (to produce a figure consistent with those at sub-paragraph *(c)* of that reply) the total for 1987-88 is £4,774,143 (£4,154,914 at constant 1984-85 prices).

[4] Constant costs have been calculated using the Treasury's GDP deflator for 1986-87 rebased to 1984-85.

Official Expenditure

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total cost to public funds of all her offices, duties, accommodation and expenses in the year 1987-88.

The Prime Minister: Final figures for 1987-88 are not yet available. The latest estimate of the total cost of all my offices in 1987-88 is £5,312,016[1].

Note:

[1] Salaries and wages, notional pension liability, administration costs and the grant-in-aid to the Chequers Trust are included. My salary as a Cabinet Minister is also included. My pay and allowances as a Member of this House are excluded.

Voluntary Bodies (Grants)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list the total amounts paid in grants by Government Departments to voluntary bodies during the financial year 1986-87; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The figures are shown in the table. The total amount provided in 1986-87 represents a cash increase of 4·4 per cent. (in real terms 1·1 per cent.) on the level of provision in 1985-86. In the period between 1979-80 and 1986-87 the level of Government support to voluntary bodies has risen by about 221 per cent. (in real terms 92·4 per cent.).

Grants by Government Departments in 1986-87

	£
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	171,700
Defence	4,825,762
Education and Science	16,229,814
Employment	33,294,000
Energy	1,118,000
Environment—direct grants	3,612,417
—urban programme	76,011,000
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	880,626
Overseas Development Administration[1]	26,822,713
Health and Social Security	35,075,544
Home Office	19,541,336
Lord Chancellor's Department	726,743
Northern Ireland Departments	14,974,781
Scottish Office—direct grants	8,970,443
—urban programme	16,600,000
Trade and Industry	8,689,088
Transport	636,000
Welsh Office—direct grants	8,467,801
—urban programme	2,850,000

[1] During 1986-87 there was a decrease in requests from voluntary agencies for grants in support of disaster, refugee and other emergency relief measures. That programme is, by its nature, reactive rather than planned. The other forms of support from the aid programme for voluntary agencies for their longer term development work increased substantially during 1986-87.

Employment

In addition, payments were made directly to voluntary bodies under various employment programmes:

	£
Manpower Services Commission	
Community Programme	480,000,000
Voluntary Projects Programme	8,250,000
Youth Training Scheme	125,000,000

The MSC makes payments to voluntary bodies under othe programmes, but these cannot be given in detail except at disproportionate cost.

	£
Northern Ireland Office (Department of Economic Development)	
Community Workshops	15,599,832
Action for Community Employment Scheme	28,489,008
Community Volunteering Scheme	654,718
Youth Community Projects	746,191
Youth Help	712,303

Departments also made grants and payments to housing associations and societies; these are as follows:

	£
Department of the Environment	842,700,000
Northern Ireland Office (Department of the Environment)	41,571,238
Scottish Office	107,571,238
Welsh Office	56,600,213

Grants made to voluntary bodies in 1986-87 by non-departmental public bodies include the following:

	£
Equal Opportunities Commission	41,866
Commission for Racial Equality	1,835,210
Countryside Commission	2,625,000
Countryside Commission for Scotland	342,491
Health Education Council	738,000
Highlands and Islands Development Board	666,895
Nature Conservancy Council	1,765,072
Sports Council	15,446,000

	£
Sports Council for Northern Ireland	405,189
Sports Council for Scotland	2,454,891
Sports Council for Wales	1,576,465

10 Downing Street (Staff)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what was the staff complement of No. 10 Downing street in 1987-88; and how many were registered disabled.

The Prime Minister: The total staff complement of 10 Downing street in 1987-88 was 67. None was registered disabled.

Official Travel

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total cost to public funds of travel by the Prime Minister and accompanying officials in 1987-88.

The Prime Minister: Final figures are not yet available and cannot be provided in the precise form requested. The latest estimate of the total cost of my travel and that of my staff in 1987-88 is £826,712.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make it her policy to use British Rail trains for travelling on official occasions; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I regret that for reasons of practicality and security it is difficult for me to travel by rail on official business. I do so when a suitable opportunity arises.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Taxation Incentives

4. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the effect of taxation incentives on the economy.

Mr. Brooke: High taxes discourage the effort, enterprise and initiative which are essential for a strong and growing economy.

Capital Taxation

11. **Mr. Bevan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what responses he has received to his Budget proposals for changes in capital taxation.

68. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what responses he has received to his Budget proposals for changes in capital taxation.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend's proposals have been well received.

Income Tax

19. **Mr. John M. Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the real increase in the yield of income tax from the top 5 per cent. of taxpayers since 1978-79.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Compared with 1978-79, the income tax liability of the top 5 per cent. of taxpayers was some £3 billion higher in real terms in 1987-88.

24. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the income tax revenue received from the top 5 per cent. of income earners has changed in each year from 1983; and what is his estimate for the coming financial year.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The income tax paid by the top 5 per cent. of taxpayers in each year since 1983 is as follows:

	£ billion	*£ billion at 1988-89 prices*
1983-84	8·5	10·5
1984-85	9·3	11·0
1985-86	11·2	12·5
1986-87	12·1	13·1
1987-88	13·2	13·7
1988-89	12·5	12·5

34. **Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the CBI on the tax reductions for top taxpayers announced in the Budget.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The CBI's Budget document called for cuts in the top marginal rates of income tax to improve incentives. Commenting on the Budget the CBI president said:

"This is the Budget we have been waiting for. It will help maintain the momentum of Britain's economic recovery. It reflects CBI priorities . . . in particular it will provide greater incentives for all in British business."

35. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much he expects the income tax revenue from the top 5 per cent. of income earners to rise following the announcement in his Budget; and what proportion he estimates this will be of total income tax revenue.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The top 5 per cent. of taxpayers paid £13·2 billion income tax in 1987-88, 30 per cent. of the yield, while in 1988-89 the top 5 per cent. of taxpayers are expected to pay £12·5 billion, 28 per cent. of the yield. The calculation makes no allowance for any changes in taxpayers' behaviour as a result of the changes in the Budget.

36. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of total income tax he expects to be paid by the top 5 per cent. of taxpayers in 1988-89; and what was the equivalent figure in 1978-79.

44. **Mr. Neil Hamilton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of total income tax he expects to be paid by the top 5 per cent. of taxpayers in 1988-89; and what was the equivalent figure in 1978-79.

66. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of total income tax he expects to be paid by the top 5 per cent. of taxpayers in 1988-89; and what was the equivalent figure in 1978-79.

Mr. Norman Lamont: It is estimated that in 1988-89 the top 5 per cent. of taxpayers will pay 28 per cent. of total income tax. The corresponding figure for 1978-79 was 24 per cent. The estimate for 1988-89 is provisional.

41. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received in favour of introducing an initial rate of income tax at a lower level than the proposed standard rate.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend has received very few representations on this subject.

47. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the figures for personal income tax rates and tax takes for 1978-79, 1981-82 and 1987-88 and the projected figures for 1988-89 and 1990-91.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Information is given in the tables. Detailed forecasts of tax revenues are not published for years after 1988-89.

Rates of income tax

	1978-79[1]		*1981-82*[1]		*1987-88*		*1988-89*	
	Slice of taxable income (£)	*Rate of tax Per cent.*	*Slice of taxable income (£)*	*Rate of tax Per cent.*	*Slice of taxable income (£)*	*Rate of tax Per cent.*	*Slice of taxable income (£)*	*Rate of tax Per cent.*
Lower rate	1- 750	25	—	—	—	—	—	—
Basic rate	751- 8,000	33	1-11,250	30	1-17,900	27	1-19,300	25
Higher rates	8,001- 9,000	40	11,251-13,250	40	17,901-20,400	40	Over 19,300	40
	9,001-10,000	45	13,251-16,750	45	20,401-25,400	45		
	10,001-11,000	50	16,751-22,250	50	25,401-33,300	50		
	11,001-12,500	55	22,251-27,750	55	33,301-41,200	55		
	12,501-14,000	60	Over 27,750	60	Over 41,200	60		
	14,001-16,000	65						
	16,001-18,500	70						
	18,501-24,000	75						
	Over 24,000	83						

[1] Investment income surcharge was also payable for these years.

Net income tax receipts

Year	*£ billion*
1978-79	18·7
1981-82	28·7
1987-88 (latest estimate)	41·4
1988-89 (forecast)	42·1

59. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the income tax burden on single pensioners with a gross income of up to £5,000 per annum and married pensioners with a gross income of up to £8,000 per annum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend has received a small number of representations, including an eloquent one from my hon. Friend.

70. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total value of the reduction in income tax enjoyed by a person with a taxable income of £100,000 per annum *(a)* in respect of the arrangements made in his Budget Statement for 1988-89 and *(b)* in total during the period 1980-81 to 1988-89.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The reduction in the annual income tax liabilities of a married man with gross annual income of £100,000 would be *(a)* £13,498 from this year's Budget proposals and *(b)* £13,585 from all Budget changes from 1980-81 to 1988-89. The figures assume that the taxpayer is entitled to no income tax relief or allowance other than the married man's allowance, and compare income tax liabilities under the proposed tax regime for 1988-89 with those under the 1987-88 and 1980-81 regimes indexed to 1988-89 levels according to the statutory formula.

73. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the real increase in the yield of income tax from the top 5 per cent. of taxpayers since 1978-79.

88. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the real increase in the yield of income tax from the top 5 per cent. of taxpayers since 1978-79.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Compared with 1978-79 the income tax liability of the top 5 per cent. of taxpayers was some £3 billion higher in real terms in 1987-88.

Economic Forecasts

20. **Mr. McCrindle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning possible overheating of the economy.

Mr. Lilley: None.

Budget (Representations)

21. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on his Budget.

27. **Mr. Patnick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on his Budget.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin).

23. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what response he has had to his Budget statement; and what action he intends to take as a result.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend's Budget has been widely welcomed, at home and abroad, as a further step in the Government's programme of tax reduction and reform within a prudent financial framework. It continues the policies designed to defeat inflation and promote individual enterprise and effort which are transforming the British economy.

Exchange Rates

22. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the operation of his policy of managing a floating exchange rate.

Mr. Lilley: The Government's policy on the exchange rate was set out in my right hon. Friend's Budget speech and in chapter 2 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report published on 15 March.

29. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a further statement on his policy towards sterling exchange rates with other major currencies.

60. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a further statement on his exchange rate policy.

82. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his exchange rate policy.

87. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make a statement on exchange rate policy after the Budget.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend set out the Government's exchange rate policy in his Budget speech on 15 March at columns 995-1015, and in chapter 2 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report published on 15 March.

76. **Mr. Beaumont-Dark:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect the exchange rate has on the performance of the economy.

Mr. Major: The exchange rate is a major factor in the determination of overall monetary conditions in the economy which are set out to maintain downward pressure on inflation. Increases in domestic costs will not be accommodated by exchange rate depreciation.

80. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to meet the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss exchange rate policy.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend has regular meetings wih the Governor of the Bank of England, at which they discuss a variety of subjects.

Economic Growth

25. **Mr. Greg Knight:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the average rate of growth in the British economy *(a)* for the last five years and *(b)* for the period 1974 to 1979.

Mr. Major: Over the last five years the average annual rate of growth has been 3·3 per cent., considerably above the 2 per cent. average from 1974 to 1979.

67. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the last year before 1987 when real growth in the economy exceeded the rate of inflation.

81. **Mr. Charles Wardle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the last year before 1987 when real growth in the economy exceeded the rate of inflation.

Mr. Major: The last year, prior to 1987, in which output growth exceeded inflation was 1964.

72. **Mr. Cash:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for how many years the rate of economic growth in the United Kingdom has averaged 3 per cent. or more.

Mr. Major: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer the Economic Secretary gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell).

Sterling Index

26. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he expects the sterling index to average in the coming year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: The Government do not forecast the exchange rate.

Departmental Staff

28. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many officials are employed within the social security division of Her Majesty's Treasury dealing with matters related to pensions.

Mr. Brooke: There are eight officials currently working in the social security division of the Treasury, who deal with pensions and other social security matters.

Third World Debt

30. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with other Finance Ministers regarding rescheduling of Third world debt; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General on 11 February to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) at column *334*.

BP

31. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans for further sales of Government shares in BP; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Treasury plans to sell its residual holding of BP cumulative preference shares in due course. It will also sell, at its discretion, its holding of BP ordinary shares in so far as this exceeds the number of shares required to satisfy outstanding share bonus entitlements.

The Bank of England has undertaken not to dispose of its holding of partly paid BP shares before 29 April 1988, except at a price in excess of 120p.

Business Investment

32. **Mr. David Davis:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest forecast for the growth of business investment over the coming year.

86. **Mr. Conway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest forecast for the growth of business investment over the coming year.

Mr. Major: As the Chancellor stated in his Budget forecast, total business investment is expected to grow by 9 per cent. in 1988.

Interest Rates

33. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of interest rates.

43. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of interest rates.

48. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of interest rates.

Mr. Lilley: Bank base rates are 8 per cent.

49. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a further statement on his policy towards interest rates.

Mr. Lilley: Short-term interest rates remain the essential instrument of monetary policy, and within a continuous and comprehensive assessment of monetary conditions, they are set at the level necessary to ensure downward pressure on inflation.

Louvre Accord

37. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next expects to meet his counterparts who were party to the Louvre accord; and what will be discussed.

Mr. Lilley: The Group of Seven Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors met yesterday and issued a statement.

Labour Statistics

38. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the rise in employment in the United Kingdom economy since 1983.

63. **Mr. Madel:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the rise in employment in the United Kingdom economy since 1983.

75. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the rise in employment in the United Kingdom economy since 1983.

Mr. Major: Employment in the United Kingdom has risen by 1¼ million since 1983.

42. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much unemployment has fallen in the United Kingdom economy over the past year.

55. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much unemployment has fallen in the United Kingdom economy over the past year.

71. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much unemployment has fallen in the United Kingdom economy over the past year.

Mr. Major: Unemployment has fallen by 535,000 over the past year. It has now fallen for 19 months in succession since July 1986, by 679,000 in total, the largest fall since the war.

Personal Incomes

39. **Mr. Chapman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the effect of his Budget proposals on a man and wife over 80 years with an income in excess of £10,600 per annum.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The reduction in tax compared with 1987-88 will be as follows:

Income £	*Reduction in tax* £	*Per cent.*
10,600	349	3·3
11,000	363	3·3
12,000	283	2·4
14,000	279	2·0

Above this level of income the reduction will be the same as for a non-aged couple. Calculations assume that the wife has no earnings or pension in her own right.

46. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the change in weekly income of a single parent, with two children, drawing supplementary benefit and child benefit, as a result of his Budget changes.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Budget is about tax, so will not have a direct effect on the incomes of those who do not pay tax. A lone parent on supplementary benefit is unlikely to be directly affected by the Budget changes unless he or she takes a job in the course of the financial year. But, on average, a lone parent can expect income support to be about £4 a week higher than the supplementary benefit payable before the introduction of the social security reforms on 11 April.

51. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the weekly gain of a single person earning £400,000 a year as a result of his Budget tax changes.

58. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the weekly gain of a single person earning £350,000 a year from his Budget tax changes.

61. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the weekly gain of a single person earning £200,000 a year from his Budget tax changes.

62. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the weekly gain of a single person earning £250,000 a year as a result of his Budget tax changes.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The table shows the gains from the Budget at each of the specified levels of earnings, assuming that there is no other income. The figures refer only to income tax and assume that the taxpayer is entitled to no income tax reliefs or allowances other than the single person's allowance. The calculations are made by comparing income tax liabilities under the 1987-88 income tax regime with those under the Budget proposal for 1988-89.

Gross yearly earnings £000s	*Gain from income tax changes* £ *per week*
200	656·54
250	848·85
350	1,233·46
400	1,425·77

Monetary Aggregates

40. **Mr. Sean Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the effect of exchange rate intervention in the last 12 months on the rate of growth of United Kingdom monetary aggregates.

69. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the effect of exchange rate intervention in the last 12 months on the rate of growth of United Kingdom moneatary aggregates.

Mr. Lilley: The impact of intervention on M0 is offset automatically by the Bank of England's daily money market operations. There is no simple relation between intervention and broad monetary growth. The Government's policy is to fund all intervention; that is, sterilise it. The published figures for February 1988 indicate that all intervention and other borrowing has been fully funded in the 12 months to that date.

Inflation

45. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current level of inflation.

Mr. Lilley: The increases in retail prices over the 12 months ending February 1988 was 3·3 per cent.

Manufactured Goods

50. **Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the balance of payments deficit or surplus for manufactured goods in 1979; and what he expects this deficit or surplus to be in 1988.

79. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the balance of payments deficit or surplus for manufactured goods in 1979; and what he expects this deficit or surplus to be in 1988.

85. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the balance of payments deficit or surplus for manufactured goods in 1979; and what he expects this deficit or surplus to be in 1988.

Mr. Major: In 1979 the balance of trade in manufactured goods was a surplus of £2·7 billion. The forecast published at the time of the Budget was for a deficit on trade in manufactures of £8½ billion in 1988. The current account as a whole is expected to show a small deficit of £4 billion in 1988, less than 1 per cent. of GDP.

Council of Ministers

52. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next proposes to have discussions with the European Community Council of Ministers about European monetary matters.

Mr. Brooke: The next meeting of the European Community's Council of Economic and Finance Ministers is expected to be held on 18 April. The agenda is expected to include the liberalisation of capital movements.

OECD Countries (Budgets)

53. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries have achieved a balanced budget or a budget surplus in the current year.

54. **Mr. Ralph Howell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries have achieved a balanced budget or a budget surplus in the current year.

57. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries have achieved a balanced budget or a budget surplus in the current year.

Mr. Lilley: As well as the United Kingdom, Australia, Denmark, Norway and Sweden are expected to achieve approximately balanced budgets in the current year.

Corporation Tax

56. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give details of the increase in revenue received following reductions in corporation tax since 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The table shows corporation tax receipts in the years from 1978-79 and the rate of tax applicable to income in each year.

	£ million[1]	*Full rate* *per cent.*	*Small companies rate per cent.*
1978-79	3,940	52	42
1979-80	4,646	52	40
1980-81	4,645	52	40
1981-82	4,930	52	40
1982-83	5,679	52	38
1983-84	6,184	50	30
1984-85	8,341	45	30
1985-86	10,708	40	30
1986-87	13,495	35	29
[2]1987-88	15,600	35	27
[3]1988-89	19,800	35	25

[1] Including advance corporation tax.
[2] Estimated.
[3] Budget forecast.

Workplace Nurseries

64. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has of the cost to the Exchequer of the introduction of tax relief for the expenses of workplace nurseries.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Firm estimates are not available but it is thought that the direct revenue cost of exempting the benefit of workplace nurseries from tax might be of the order of £1 million per annum.

National Insurance

65. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding the integration of national insurance contributions into the income tax system.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations on this subject.

Married Women (Taxation)

74. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what responses he has received to his Budget proposals for changes in the taxation of married women.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory).

Take-Home Pay

74. **Mr. Couchman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what pay increase a married man with two children on average earnings would need to maintain his real take-home pay unchanged between 1987-88 and 1988-89.

90. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what pay increase a married man with two children on average earnings would need to maintain his real take-home pay unchanged between 1987-88 and 1988-89.

Mr. Norman Lamont: After his income tax reductions, a pay increase of 2 per cent. would be more than enough to maintain his real take-home pay.

89. **Mr. William Powell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much in real terms he expects take-home pay for a married man with two children on average earnings to have risen between 1978-79 and 1988-89.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I expect his real take-home pay to have risen by 27½ between 1978-79 and 1988-89, compared with about ½per cent. between 1973-74 and 1978-79 under the Labour Government.

Pay-As-You-Earn Deductions

78. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to reduce the total amount of pay-as-you-earn deductions written off as irrecoverable.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Measures introduced in 1985 allow the Inland Revenue to assess and take recovery action for unpaid PAYE more quickly. Regulations now before the House introduce an interest charge where overdue PAYE is formally determined. The Budget proposals include a more general end-year interest charge on overdue PAYE, to come into force once the necessary computer facilities in the Revenue are operational.

Pensions (Income)

83. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the effect on the weekly income of a single pensioner with no private income or pension as a result of his Budget changes.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Budget is about tax, so will not have a direct effect on the incomes of those who do not pay tax. A single pensioner with no private income or pension is unlikely to be directly affected by the Budget changes but will have a 4·2 per cent. increase in state pension from 11 April.

Business Taxation

84. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what responses he has received to his Budget proposals for changes in business taxation.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown).

Personal Taxation

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning the changes in the personal taxation regime announced in the Budget; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend's proposals for tax cuts and reform have been widely welcomed.

Taxation Changes

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received arising from the taxation changes proposed in his Budget.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend's proposals for tax reduction and reform have been widely welcomed.

National Health Service

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the annual cost incurred by the Treasury in raising and then distributing that proportion of financial resources which is designated by the Government to be spent on the National Health Service.

Mr. Major: There are no separate arrangements for collecting revenue to fund particular activities. In 1987-88 total central Government revenues from taxes and national insurance contributions are estimated at around £144 billion. Most of these revenues are collected by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and Inland Revenue. The administrative costs of the two Departments were £1·5 billion. Some £20·7 billion was spent on the NHS so, on a pro rata basis, the cost of collecting centrally-funded NHS expenditure was about £215 million. The costs of distributing the funds spent on the NHS cannot be separately identified.

Manufacturing Industry (Investment)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how he proposes to increase investment in manufacturing industry.

Mr. Brooke: The Government's economic policies will continue to encourage capital investment by promoting an environment in which business can prosper.

ENVIRONMENT

Lower Don Valley

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether all the finance proposed for the lower Don valley urban development corporation is new money; and if there will be no reduction in existing allocations of finance to Sheffield.

Mr. Trippier: The proposed urban development corporation would bring additional Government resources to Sheffield of about £50 million over the next seven years.

Sheffield Urban Development Corporation

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what developments are already commissioned in the area covered by the Sheffield urban development corporation and what is their total development cost.

Mr. Trippier: The Coopers and Lybrand report identified a number of proposals in the area of the proposed urban development corporation which it estimates could bring about £300 million investment into the lower Don valley.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many planning applications were received by Sheffield local authority in each of the last two years in the area covered by the urban development corporation; how many were rejected; and what was the average time for receiving planning permission in rejection.

Mr. Trippier: The information requested is not available as statistics on development control are not collected centrally for areas smaller than local planning authorities.

Endangered Species Branch

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost to public funds of the endangered species branch of his Department; how many staff work in this branch; and how many import licences were issued by it in 1987.

Mr. Ridley: The current estimated cost is £537,136 annually. The number of staff employed is 23. The number of import licences issued in 1987 was 15,923, which represents about 60 per cent. of the work of the branch.

System-built Houses

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what representations he has received from Liverpool city council concerning defective dwellings, particularly Boot and Boswell-type houses; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will meet a delegation from Liverpool city council to discuss the problems of defective dwellings of Boot and Boswell-type houses.

Mrs. Roe: We have receied various letters from Liverpool city council concerning its housing defects obligations, including one from the city solicitor about Boot and Boswell houses.

The Department's officials met council officers on 15 March for a full discussion. The council has also bid for a share of the £20 million reserve set aside nationally for 1988/89 for those authorities with particular HDA difficulties; decisions on the additional allocations will be made soon. In these circumstances we do not think that a delegation from the council is the best way forward. I will, however, write to the hon. Member with a copy of my officials' reply to the city solicitor.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each urban development corporation the amount of public money allocated for each year since its inception, and the percentage changes these sums represent.

Mr. Trippier: The grants-in-aid allocated to urban development corporations are given each year in the Supply Estimates. Subsequent amendments and eventual outturn are recorded respectively in the relevant Supplementary Estimates and in subsequent Supply Estimates.

Concierge Systems

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* details of his Department's report on concierge systems.

Mrs. Roe: My Department published a report entitled "A Better Reception: the development of concierge schemes" on 21 March. The report examines different approaches to concierge arrangements in blocks of flats and lists nearly 40 local authorities who are experimenting in this way. The evidence at this early stage of development suggests strongly that they can be cost-effective in reducing crime and vandalism and in increasing residents' sense of security, as well as in improving the provision of day-to-day housing management services. I have arranged for copies of this report to be placed in the Library.

Hampton Court Palace

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out in the *Official Report* the figures for the takings at Hampton Court palace for Easter weekend 1988 with the corresponding figures for Easter weekend in 1987, 1986, 1985 and 1984 and such previous years for which figures are conveniently available.

Mr. Moynihan: The information is as follows:

	Admission takings £	*Sales takings* £	*Maze car park* £	*Total* £
1988	34,942	10,573	[3]6,875	52,390
1987	33,040	8,397	5,763	47,200
1986	[1]10,683	3,426	3,248	17,357
1985	22,149	6,439	4,274	32,862
1984	[2]15,850	4,305	4,242	24,397

[1] Closed Easter Monday 1986, following major fire.
[2] Closed Good Friday in 1984 and previous years.
[3] From 27 March 1988, entry to the maze is free to those paying to enter the state apartments (full price £2·80).
Except for 1984 and 1986, all figures relate to Good Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday.
Figures for years prior to 1984 not readily available.

Downing Street (Decoration and Furnishing)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the cost of *(a)* decoration and *(b)* furnishing for 10 Downing street in 1987-88.

Mr. Chope: In the 11 months up to the end of February 1988, the latest available figures, expenditure during 1987-88 on furnishings and decoration in 10 Downing street was £14,836·15 for furnishing and £11,433·07 for decoration.

Secure Car Service

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total cost of the secure car service in 1987-88.

Mr. Chope: The cost of providing a secure car service to Ministers and heads of Departments during 1987-88 was £2·37 million.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total cost for the Prime Minister's secure car service in 1987-88.

Mr. Chope: The cost of providing secure cars for the Prime Minister during 1987-88 was £107,380.

Ministerial Vehicles (Parking Fines)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will *(a)* give the total amount paid by his Department in 1987 in respect of parking fines incurred by ministerial vehicles and *(b)* provide a breakdown by Government Department in terms of offence, fine, date and location.

Mr. Chope: The sum paid in parking fines in respect of Government car service vehicles in 1987 was £1,037 for 85 offences, a significant reduction on 1986.

The details by Department are as follows:

	Fines
Scottish Office	36
Welsh Office	2
Treasury	2
Department of Energy	3
Home Office	6
Department of Environment	6
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	10
Department of Employment	4
Department of Health and Social Security	7
Department of Transport	2
Management and Personnel Office	2
Northern Ireland Office	1
Department of Education and Science	1
	85

A further breakdown could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

London Marathon

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution his Department is making to the organisation of the 1988 London marathon; and what charges will be made to the organisers.

Mr. Moynihan: The Government continue to give support and encouragement to the London marathon. This includes the use of a substantial part of Greenwich park and of routes in St. James's park. No facility fee is charged for the use of the royal parks, but the London marathon board is required to reimburse the net costs of additional works and facilities provided specifically for the event. Net costs in 1987 were £880.

London Residuary Body

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will accept a nomination from the Association of London Authorities for membership of the London residuary body; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend is always prepared to consider suggestions for appointments but he sees no need at present to make further appointments to the London residuary body.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of 22 October 1987, if there have been any changes in remuneration of members of the London residuary body and when the next review is due.

Mr. Chope: One member's remuneration was reduced to £13,084 from 1 April 1988 to reflect a reduced time commitment. The remuneration of the other members and the chairman has remained unchanged since 1 October 1987.

The next review is expected to take place in the context of the 1988 general review of remuneration of members of public boards.

New Homes (Docklands)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the median price paid for new homes on land owned by the London Docklands Development Corporation in 1987.

Mr. Trippier: This information is being collated. I will write to the hon. Member.

Sports Sponsorship

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will break down the total business sponsorship of sport in 1986-87 by each sport;

(2) what are the latest estimates of total business sponsorship of sport in the years 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88; and if he will give a detailed breakdown of how these estimates were made.

Mr. Moynihan: The Sports Council's estimates of national business sponsorship of sport, by calendar years, are as follows:

	£ million
1985	128
1986	146
1987	164

These estimates are derived from coverage in the press and television and other sources monitored by the Sports Council. They do not include local sponsorship, for which no estimates are available and are therefore likely to understate the true extent of sports sponsorship. They cannot conveniently be broken down into estimates for individual sports.

Local Authority Tenants

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what questions his Department has agreed shall be put to local authority tenants, for the purposes of research into their attitudes towards a change of their landlord, being carried out by the British Marketing Bureau; what information his Department has agreed shall be given to local authority tenants about the implications of a change of their landlord, for the purposes of this research; and if he will lay a copy of the questions and the information in the Library;

(2) *(a)* which local authority areas have been selected, for the purposes of research into the attitudes of existing council tenants towards a change of their landlord, commissioned by his Department from the British Marketing Bureau; and on what basis these areas were

selected and *(b)* how many local authority tenants have been interviewed in each area for the purposes of this research and on what basis these tenants have been selected;

(3) *(a)* for what purpose his Department has commissioned the British Marketing Bureau to carry out research into the attitudes of existing local authority tenants towards a change of their landlord, *(b)* when this research was commissioned, and over what period it is being carried out, *(c)* to what use his Department intends the results of this research to be put; and when, how and to whom the findings will be made available and *(d)* what is the cost of this research.

Mrs. Roe: Tenants on a number of estates were invited to help identify factors important in a tenant's choice of landlord. The research, costing £11,750, is being carried out by the British Market Research Bureau to assist in the development and evaluation of policy. The consultants were commissioned in January 1988 to report at the end of May. Fieldwork involving two groups of 10 tenants took place in each of eight local authorities, between 21 March and 7 April. The local authorities varied in terms of size, type of area and authority. We are seeking the consent of the authorities concerned to publication of their names, and I shall write to the hon. Gentleman when their replies have been received. The research method involved group discussions, based on topics, rather than on formal questions, designed to stimulate discussion among tenants and to elicit their views about landlords. When we receive the consultants' report, we shall consider publication.

GLC (Seaside and Country Homes)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress by the London residuary body in the disposal of the former Greater London council seaside and country homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: On 28 March the London residuary body sold the seaside and country homes to North British Housing Association, and completed an agreement reserving future lettings for elderly Londoners.

Showman's Guild

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if officials of his Department have met representatives of the Showman's Guild to discuss planning problems; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Ridley *[holding reply 12 April]:* I know of the problems encountered by some show people in finding permanent sites suitable as bases to accommodate themselves and their families and to maintain their equipment. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) has been in touch with the local authority associations to ascertain the extent and nature of the problem, and my officials have met representatives and members of the Showmen's Guild for Great Britain. We are considering the material submitted by the associations and the guild.

Hyson Green Flats, Nottingham (Sale)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will exercise his powers under section 22(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 to require the National Audit Commission to direct an extraordinary audit of the accounts of the Nottingham city council in respect of the sale of the Hyson Green flats site for £3·7 million in the light of its market value of £10 million; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: No. I understand that the auditor is already investigating this matter.

Rating Reform

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is yet in a position to update his estimates of the impact of the community charge on individual households.

Mr. Ridley *[pursuant to the reply, 13 January 1988, c. 278]:* The Government have now decided on the taper to be used in calculating entitlement to community charge rebates under the new system.

Under the Government's existing proposals, all those receiving income support—the successor to supplementary benefit—will have their rates, or in future their community charge bills, reduced by 80 per cent. so they will pay only 20 per cent. of the community charge for the area in which they live. In addition, their income support will include an amount to help meet the 20 per cent. charges that they do have to pay.

Those with incomes above the income support level will also be eligible for rebates of up to 80 per cent. according to their circumstances. In 1988-89, with domestic rates, the amount of their rebate is reduced by 20p for each £1 increase in their income. The Government have now decided that, when the community charge is introduced, rebates should be calculated on the basis of a lower "taper", of 15p for every additional £1 of income. This means that the amount of community charges of those on low incomes will rise more slowly as their incomes increase. Their rebate will be reduced by only 15p for every £1 rise in their net earnings above the income support level.

This reduced taper will come into effect when the community charge is introduced—in Scotland in 1989 and in England and Wales in 1990.

Four million people will receive the maximum 80 per cent. reduction. If a 20 per cent. had been used for the community charge, about a further 4 million people would have received reductions of up to 80 per cent. With a 15p taper, rebates will extend further up the income scale, One million additional adults will have their community charge bill reduced. About 9 million people will pay reduced charges, and about 5 million people with incomes above the income support level will have larger reductions in community charge than they would have had with the 20p taper.

Of these 5 million, about three quarters are people who do not pay income tax.

This improvement in the rebate proposals achieves a better targeted result than the new clause I proposal for a 50 per cent. community charge for those who do not pay income tax. But it does so by a simpler and much less bureaucratic route, with no anomalies, and one that avoids the earnings trap which new clause I would produce. It does not require an amendment to the Local Government Finance Bill.

DEFENCE

Morocco

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the purpose of the recent Royal Air Force official visit to the Kingdom of Morocco.

Mr. Ian Stewart: It is normal practice, in the interests of good relations, to maintain links with a wide range of friendly countries, including the Kingdom of Morocco. The recent visit by the Chief of the Air Staff was intended particularly to strengthen links between the Royal Air Force and the Moroccan air force and discuss matters of common interest.

Devonport Dockyard

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people were made redundant at Devonport dockyard between 1 March and 6 April.

Mr. Sainsbury: The primary responsibility for redundancy in the royal dockyards rests with the contractors. However, my Department will have paid compensation to 668 ex-Civil Service employees (500 industrials, 168 non-industrials) who left Devonport dockyard in the period 1 March to 6 April this year.

Project Waterfront

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is Project Waterfront.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Ministry of Defence has no such project.

British Army Equipment Exhibition

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the companies exhibiting products or services at the British Army equipment exhibition between 26 June and 1 July; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: In line with previous exhibitions the list of companies exhibiting products or services at the British Army equipment exhibition 88 will be published on 26 June 1988.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to allow Amnesty International to have a stall at the British Army equipment exhibition in Aldershot between 26 June and 1 July; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: No. The British Army equipment exhibition is an exhibition to allow United Kingdom defence industry to show its products. Amnesty International is not part of the United Kingdom defence manufacturing industry.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries whose representatives have been invited to the seventh British Army equipment exhibition at Aldershot from 26 June to 1 July 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: In common with all my predecessors, I do not intend to publish a list of countries invited to the British Army equipment exhibition.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many visitors are expected at the British Army equipment exhibition in Aldershot between 26 June and 1 July.

Mr. Sainsbury: Based on previous exhibitions, a total of some 25,000 visitors are expected to attend BAEE in Aldershot between 26 June and 1 July.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the total cost for organising the British Army equipment exhibition between 26 June and 1 July; and who will perform the opening ceremony.

Mr. Sainsbury: The cost of the British Army equipment exhibition, which we estimate will be £2·4 million, will be fully recovered from the participating companies. The opening ceremony will be performed by Secretary of State for Defence.

Bangladesh (Military Training)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if any military training is being provided by United Kingdom military personnel in Bangladesh.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The only military training provided by the United Kingdom is given by the three officers of the British military advisory team at the Bangladesh defence services command and staff college.

Military Training

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries whose military personnel have received training within the United Kingdom or in the United Kingdom bases overseas in each of the last three years.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The countries concerned are as follows:

1987-88

Algeria
Australia
Bahamas
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belgium
Belize
Bermuda
Botswana
Brazil
Brunei
Burma
Cameroon
Canada
Chile
Congo
Cyprus
Denmark
Egypt
El Salvador
Federal Republic of Germany
Fiji
Finland
France
Gambia
Ghana
Gibraltar
Greece
Guyana
Hong Kong
India
Indonesia

Iraq
Iceland
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kenya
Kuwait
Lesotho
Luxembourg
Malawi
Malaysia
Maldives
Malta
Mauritius
Mazambique
Nepal
Netherlands
New Zealand
Nigeria
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Philippines
Portugal
Qatar
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Sierra Leone
Singapore
Somalia
South Korea
Spain
Sri Lanka
St. Vincent
Sudan
Swaziland
Sweden
Switzerland
Tanzania
Thailand
Trinidad
Tunisia
Turkey
United Arab Emirates
Uganda
United States of America
Yemen Arab Republic
Zambia
Zimbabwe

1986-87

Algeria
Australia
Bahamas
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belgium
Belize
Bermuda
Botswana
Brazil
Brunei
Cameroon
Canada
Chile
Denmark
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Federal Republic of Germany
Fiji
France
Gambia
Ghana
Greece
Guyana
Hong Kong
India
Indonesia
Iraq
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kenya
Kuwait
Lebanon
Lesotho
Malawi
Malaysia
Maldives
Malta
Mauritius
Mozambique
Nepal
Netherlands
New Zealand
Nigeria
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Philippines
Portugal
Qatar
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Sierra Leone
Singapore
South Korea
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Swaziland
Sweden
Switzerland
Tanzania
Thailand
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
United Arab Emirates
Uganda
United States of America
Uruguay
Venezuela
Yemen Arab Republic
Yugoslavia
Zambia
Zimbabwe

1985-86

Algeria
Australia
Austria
Bahamas
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belgium
Belize
Bermuda
Botswana
Brazil
Brunei
Canada
Chile
Denmark
Ecuador
Egypt
Federal Republic of Germany
Fiji
Finland
France
Gambia
Ghana

Greece
Guyana
Hong Kong
India
Indonesia
Iraq
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kenya
Kuwait
Lebanon
Lesotho
Malawi
Malaysia
Maldives
Mauritius
Mozambique
Nepal
Netherlands
New Zealand
Nigeria
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Philippines
Portugal
Qatar
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Sierre Leone
Singapore
South Korea
Spain
Sri Lanka
St. Vincent
Sudan
Swaziland
Sweden
Switzerland
Tanzania
Thailand
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
United Arab Emirates
Uganda
United States of America
Uruguay
Venezuela
Yemen Arab Republic
Yugoslavia
Zaire
Zambia
Zimbabwe

Greenham Common

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cases of trespass have been reported at Greenham common since January 1987.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* Eight hundred and twelve cases of trespass were recorded between 1 January 1987 and 7 April 1988.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Plant Testing and Seed Certification

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made on the review of plant variety testing and seed certification in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friends and I have now received a report from the team of officials set up to conduct this review. I am arranging for a copy of the report to be placed in the Library of the House.

We welcome receipt of this report which makes a comprehensive study of the operation of the systems for plant breeders' rights, the national listing of plant varieties and seed certification in the United Kingdom. It concludes that the systems have served the industry well in the past but that change is now required to meet the needs of plant breeders, the seed industry, farmers and growers, and the processing industry. The report makes a large number of recommendations which would change procedures, increase cost effectiveness and efficiency, and alter the funding arrangements. In order to allow full consideration of these recommendations, we intend to publish the report straightaway and invite all interested parties to comment on its findings.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the cases of detected fraud within the common agricultural policy; and what is being done to halt this malpractice.

Mr. MacGregor: In the period from 1984 to 1987 inclusive there have been 31 cases of detected fraud in the United Kingdom under the CAP. Of these 17 were settled out of court and 14 were prosecuted, leading to three prison sentences and fines totalling £29,950. In addition, there were some 300 cases where action was taken to recover payments made irregularly.

Rigorous checks are made by this Ministry, Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce to deter and detect fraud under the CAP. I am also pressing other member states and the Commission to step up co-ordinated action against fraud across the Community.

Port Talbot Harbour and Channel (Spoil)

Mr. Speller: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to reject the application to dump 11 million tonnes of capital spoil arising from Port Talbot harbour and channel in the Bristol channel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I am currently considering all aspects of an application to dump at sea dredged spoil from Port Talbot harbour and channel, including possible disposal sites. Applications for dumping of dredged spoil must be considered under the licensing provisions of part II of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985. Licences are not issued unless careful scientific examination shows the operation to be acceptable in terms of its impact on the marine environment, the living resources that it supports and human health, and unless it conforms to the relevant international conventions. The practical availability of alternative methods of dealing with the spoil is also taken into account.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 15 April 1988

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Departmental Memoranda

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether his Department has any plans to increase the security of internal departmental memoranda; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: It is not the usual practice to give information on such matters.

National Curriculum (Staffing Levels)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received concerning the implications of the implementation of a national curriculum for staffing levels in schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: We have received over 10,000 responses to our proposals; a number of these raised questions about the implementation of the national curriculum, including the teaching and other resources required for it. Our decisions on the phasing of its introduction will take account of all relevant factors, including staffing levels.

Merchant Navy College, Greenhithe

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received about the proposed closure of the Merchant Navy college at Greenhithe; and what reply he has given.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has received representations from right hon. and hon. Members, from the principal and staff of the college, and from parents or employers of past, current and prospective students.

While recognising that the college has won praise for the quality of its work; the question of its future is a matter for the college itself and for the Inner London education authority which maintains it.

Education Assets Board

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will state the emoluments to be paid to the chairman of the education assets board; and what other posts in the public service the chairman holds.

Mr. Jackson: The chairman of the education assets board, Mr. Tom McDonald OBE, will be paid £17,330 per annum for a time commitment of two days a week. Mr. McDonald is currently also chairman of the West Yorkshire residuary body and unpaid chairman of the Yorkshire and Humberside and East Midlands industrial development board.

NERC Centre, Barry

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what representations he has received concerning the future of the Natural Environment Research Council's research vessels services centre at Barry in South Glamorgan; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the future of the Natural Environment Research Council's research vessels services centre at Barry in South Glamorgan.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend has received no representations concerning the future of the Natural Environment Research Council research vessels services centre at Barry in South Glamorgan. The future of the centre is a matter for NERC, and I understand that the council is investigating the feasibility of resiting the centre to Southampton as part of a proposed interdisciplinary research centre on deep sea oceanography.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Extradition

Mr. Gow: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting of officials which took place on 7 April to which he referred in his written answer to the hon. Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) on 30 March, *Official Report*, column *484;* when he expects next to meet the Attorney-General of the Irish Republic and when he now expects to agree extradition arrangements with the Government of the Irish Republic.

The Attorney-General: The meeting of officials on 7 April clarified several matters. I am very hopeful that there will shortly be effective extradition between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland under the new Irish legislation.

Birmingham Pub Bombings

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General who selected the Law Lords to hear the application for leave to appeal by the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings.

The Attorney-General: In accordance with the usual practice the principal clerk of the Judicial Office, acting under the general authority of the Lord Chancellor, selected the names of the law lords to sit on the appeal committee which considered the application for leave to appeal in the Birmingham pub bombings case.

As a matter of general practice the Lord Chancellor does not intervene in the arrangements for particular law lords to hear particular cases and did not do so in this case.

PRIME MINISTER

Value Added Tax

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Prime Minister what recent representations she has received over the suggested introduction of value added tax charges on children's shoes; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have received a number of representations about value added tax including on children's clothing.

Pakistan (Explosion)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister what messages of sympathy have been conveyed by Her Majesty's

Government to the bereaved relatives and friends of those killed in the arms explosion in Pakistan, and to relatives and friends of those injured in the explosion; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Her Majesty the Queen sent a message of sympathy to President Zia, to the families of those who suffered, and to the people of Pakistan. I sent a similar message to Prime Minister Junejo.

Water (Nitrate Levels)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Prime Minister what is the remit of the Cabinet Office working party set up to look at nitrate levels in drinking water; what external representatives are on the working party; when any recommendations are due to be made; and if the conclusions will be published.

The Prime Minister: It is not the practice to provide such information. I also refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) on 26 January 1988 at column *133*.

Departmental Correspondence (Confidentiality)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what action her Office has taken to investigate the circumstances of the unauthorised disclosure of recent correspondence between her Office and that of the Secretary of State for Scotland concerning opting out of the educational system in Scotland.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to him by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland on 12 April 1988, at column *44*, and my reply of 14 March 1988 at column *425*.

Visits

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister when she last visited *(a)* a jobcentre, *(b)* a Department of Health and Social Security office *(c)* a military establishment and *(d)* a trade union office.

The Prime Minister: In the course of each year I visit a wide variety of companies, offices, organisations and establishments. Information going back to 1979 is not immediately available in the form requested. I did, however, recently visit Wellington barracks. I have not visited a trade union office.

SCOTLAND

"Management of Private Practice in NHS Hospitals"

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of the Home and Health Department's handbook, "Management of Private Practice in NHS Hospitals".

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A copy of the handbook has already been placed in the Library.

Health Boards (Agency Workers)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much each Scottish health board spent on agency workers in the most recent available year; and what percentage this was of their overall nursing costs.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Relevant information in health boards' annual accounts is recorded under the category of "non-payroll" nursing costs. While this relates principally to the cost of engaging agency nursing staff, some other expenditure (such as payments for nursing staff in non National Health Service hospitals which have contractual arrangements with health boards) is also included. The figures for 1986-87 are given in the table.

Health board	*Non-payroll nursing costs £ thousand*	*Per cent.*[1]
Argyll and Clyde	2	0·01
Ayrshire and Arran	—	—
Borders	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—
Fife	—	—
Forth Valley	—	—
Grampian	27	0·05
Greater Glasgow	1,030	0·78
Highland	28	0·13
Lanarkshire	—	—
Lothian	1,757	2·11
Orkney	—	—
Shetland	21	0·99
Tayside	140	0·27
Western Isles	—	—
Total	3,005	0·78

[1] As proportion of total expenditure on nurses' salaries and wages.

Homeless Persons

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current cost to each district council of housing homeless persons; and what proportion of this is for bed and breakfast accommodation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not held centrally.

DEFENCE

Military Personnel

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many military personnel have left the armed services in each year since 1974;

(2) how many military personnel have left the armed services at the end of a fixed term of service in each year since 1974;

(3) how many military personnel have left the armed services for medical reasons in each year since 1974;

(4) how many military personnel have left the armed services at retirement age in each year since 1974;

(5) how many military personnel have been dismissed from the armed services in each year since 1974;

(6) how many military personnel have left the armed services for reasons other than *(a)* end of a fixed term of service, *(b)* medical reasons *(c)* retirement age *(d)* dismissal, in each year since 1974.

Mr. Freeman: Details of the numbers leaving the armed forces by cause in each financial year are shown in the table. It is not possible to distinguish between exits at the end of a fixed term of service and exits at retirement age and a single category covering these two groups has therefore been shown. This category includes those leaving

the Army having given notice. The numbers shown as dismissed include administrative dismissals as well as disciplinary discharge.

Year	Total Outflow	Time and age expiries	Medical and Death	Dismissal	All other reasons
1974-75	53,109	20,338	2,892	5,814	24,065
1975-76	48,530	18,583	2,253	6,188	21,506
1976-77	46,412	17,257	2,228	6,367	20,560
1977-78	48,002	16,963	2,177	6,018	22,844
1978-79	49,306	15,385	2,087	5,673	26,161
1979-80	45,042	13,926	1,713	5,556	23,847
1980-81	37,535	11,967	1,423	6,383	17,762
1981-82	29,451	10,289	1,235	7,165	10,762
1982-83	28,657	11,625	1,475	6,426	9,131
1983-84	31,926	12,430	1,228	6,587	11,681
1984-85	34,554	12,955	1,578	6,092	13,929
1985-86	36,521	13,911	1,709	5,589	15,312
1986-87	36,961	14,811	1,550	5,657	14,943
Apr-Dec 1987	27,167	10,548	1,173	4,344	11,102

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many military personnel have left the Army in each year since 1974;

(2) how many military personnel have left the Army at the end of a fixed term of service in each year since 1974;

(3) how many military personnel have left the Army for medical reasons in each year since 1974;

(4) how many military personnel have left the Army at retirement age in each year since 1974;

(5) how many military personnel have been dismissed from the Army in each year since 1974;

(6) how many military personnel have left the Army for reasons other than *(a)* end of fixed term of service, *(b)* medical reasons *(c)* retirement age, or *(d)* dismissal, in each year since 1974.

Mr. Freeman: Details of the numbers leaving the Army by cause in each financial year are shown in the table below. It is not possible in the available statistics to distinguish between exits at the end of a fixed term of service and exits at retirement age and a single category covering these two groups has therefore been shown. This category includes those leaving the Army having given notice.

The numbers shown as dismissed include administrative dismissals as well as disciplinary discharges

	Total outflow	Time and age expiries	Medical and death	Dismissal	All other reasons
1974-75	28,889	10,578	1,570	3,584	13,157
1975-76	26,797	9,418	1,353	4,254	11,772
1976-77	26,610	9,227	1,365	4,377	11,641
1977-78	29,072	10,033	1,328	4,016	13,695
1978-79	29,807	9,168	1,265	3,783	15,591
1979-80	26,348	8,877	1,055	3,722	12,694
1980-81	21,919	7,554	792	4,221	9,352
1981-82	17,094	6,242	713	4,995	5,144
1982-83	17,178	7,117	897	4,776	4,388
1983-84	19,959	7,936	681	4,931	6,411
1984-85	21,448	8,322	998	4,422	7,706
1985-86	21,301	8,621	1,120	4,009	7,551
1986-87	21,761	9,418	1,032	3,875	7,436
April to December 1987	16,707	6,861	814	2,931	6,101

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people have joined the Army as military personnel in each year since 1974.

Mr. Freeman: The numbers of people joining the Army from civil life in each financial year since 1974-75 are shown below:

Year	Number
1974-75	24,264
1975-76	29,591
1976-77	24,088
1977-78	22,550
1978-79	25,254
1979-80	29,189
1980-81	28,871
1981-82	14,204
1982-83	13,071
1983-84	22,348
1984-85	22,278
1985-86	20,268
1986-87	19,918
April-December 1987	15,379

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people have joined the armed services as military personnel in each year since 1974.

Mr. Freeman: The numbers of people joining the armed services from civil life in each financial year since 1974-75 are shown below:

Year	Number
1974-75	42,236
1975-76	46,906
1976-77	40,244
1977-78	38,237
1978-79	43,366
1979-80	50,652
1980-81	50,488
1981-82	22,607
1982-83	21,647
1983-84	36,991
1984-85	34,721
1985-86	32,651
1986-87	34,049
April-December 1987	24,553

Hanover Air Show

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to visit the Hanover air show in May.

Mr. Younger: I hope to do so subject to the pressure of Government business.

Low Flying

Dr. Thomas : To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of complaints received about low flying in 1987 were identified as relating to *(a)* fast jets, *(b)* light jet trainers, *(c)* heavy propellor-driven aircraft, *(d)* light propellor-driven aircraft and helicopters.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* The proportion of complaints and inquiries about low flying received in 1987 identified as relating to fast jets, light jet trainers, heavy propeller-driven aircraft and light propeller-driven aircraft and helicopters is, respectively, 71·4 per cent., 0·1 per cent., 2·1 per cent. and 2·7 per cent. In the remaining 23·7 per cent. of cases the type of aircraft involved is not known.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of complaints received about low flying in 1987 were identified as relating to *(a)* British military aircraft, *(b)* United States air force aircraft and *(c)* other military aircraft.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* The nationality of the aircraft involved is rarely mentioned in complaints, and the majority of complaint records do not include this information. Where it is available, in 5·71 per cent. of all cases, the percentages of the total relating to British military aircraft, United States air forces aircraft and other military aircraft are 4·51 per cent., 1·18 per cent. and 0·02 per cent. respectively.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low flying sorties were carried out over *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland during 1987.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* Fixed-wing low-flying training is not currently undertaken in Northern Ireland. Otherwise, a typical low-level sortie covers some 300-500 miles and commonly covers more than one of the areas mentioned. The information requested is not available.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Baltic States

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise the question of the self-determination of the Baltic states under principle VIII of basket 1 of the Helsinki Final Act at the current review conference in Vienna; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We have no plans to do so. Our position of de facto but not de jure recognition of the incorporation of the Baltic states into the Soviet Union is well-known. Our delegation in Vienna have raised a number of human rights violations which have taken place in the Baltic states.

Gibraltar (Shootings)

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to when the inquest on the shootings of the three Irish Republican Army members in Gibraltar will take place.

Mr. Mellor: The timing of the inquest into the deaths of the three IRA terrorists is a matter for the coroner in Gibraltar. A date has not yet been fixed for the inquest hearing.

Western Sahara

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice is made available to British travel companies as to the inadvisability of offering holidays in the western Sahara, the war zone of the conflict between the Polisario guerillas and the Moroccan army, in view of the fact that a number of holiday makers have been killed in that area.

Mr. Eggar: Our current advice is that the territory of the western Sahara is disputed and the United Kingdom regards sovereignty as undetermined.

Much of the territory is under military jurisdiction and travel is subject to restriction. We have no diplomatic representation in the territory and normal consular services are not available. We would, therefore, discourage travel outside the tourist areas.

To the best of our knowledge there are no organised tours to the area.

Pakistan (Explosion)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will arrange for information about the names of the dead and injured in the recent explosion disaster in Pakistan to be available and for telephone inquiries for information to be received from British citizens or overseas nationals, settled in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Her Majesty's embasssy in Islamabad reports that its checks have not revealed any deaths or injuries amongst the British community.

Inquiries about the safety of non-British nationals in Pakistan should be addressed to either the Pakistan embassy in London or the authorities in Pakistan.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance has been offered by Her Majesty's Government to the Government of Pakistan to relieve suffering following the armament explosion disaster; what assistance has been sought of Her Majesty's Government by the Pakistant Government; and if Her Majesty's Government will make a contribution to any disaster appeal established in Pakistan.

Mr. Eggar: My noble Friend, Lord Trefgarne, who was in Islamabad at the time of the disaster, asked the Pakistan Prime Minister to let us know if there was any assistance which we could provide. If a specific request for help is received, we shall do what we can to meet it.

South African Embassy

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what sums were paid to his Department in compensation for damage to the South African embassy following the conviction of Mr. Adam Bowles and two associates of offences during an anti-apartheid demonstration.

Mr. Eggar: Mr. Adam Bowles was sentenced at Southwark crown court on 23 March to 14 days'

imprisonment. His two associates were conditionally discharged and ordered to pay £250 each compensation for damage, the payment to be made within 60 days. No payment has yet been made.

Immigration

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the cost of dealing with a genuine application for immigration into the United Kingdom from Bangladesh *(a)* where DNA fingerprinting is used to verify the genuineness of the application, and *(b)* where only existing administrative techniques are used; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The cost of commercial DNA testing is met by those who initiate it. The time taken to process cases, whether or not DNA testing is involved, varies considerably from case to case. For this reason costs are not broken down as to type of application or on an individual basis.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Budget Changes

Mr. Butler: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the amount by which the increased revenues from changes in taxes and duties announced in his Budget Statement will be offset by additional expenditure on benefits and other payments linked to the retail price index; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: The direct impact on the retail price index of the changes in taxes and duties announced in the Budget is estimated to be an increase of 0·4 per cent. The cost of a corresponding increase in social security benefits linked to the index from April 1989 is estimated to be about £165 million in 1989-90. Other payments directly affected by changes in the retail price index include public sector pensions. However, these costs are not additional to the Government's public expenditure plans set out in the public expenditure White Paper Cm. 288 for two reasons:

(a) the impact of the Budget measures on the retail price index is not additional to the assumption on inflation underlying the provision for social security; indeed, the forecast of the increase in the retail price index to the fourth quarter of 1988 published at the time of the Budget is slightly lower than was assumed at the time of the White Paper;

(b) the plans included large unallocated reserves of £7 billion in 1989-90 and £10·5 billion in 1990-91 which will be available to meet unforeseen requirements, including any revised estimates of demand-led expenditure; and

(c) the reduction in income tax announced in the Budget should have the effect of reducing social security expenditure by about £30 million in a full year.

Government Expenditure

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will commission an audit of Government expenditure by region.

Mr. Major: All central Government expenditure throughout the United Kingdom is subject to audit by the National Audit Office. The Government also publish extensive information on the geographical distribution of public expenditure as was explained in evidence provided by the Treasury to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee (published as appendix 5 to the Committee's Second Report of the current Session).

Government Securities (Redemption)

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the cost to the Exchequer of redeeming *(a)* 3½ per cent. war loan and *(b)* all undated Government securities.

Mr. Lilley: The cost of redeeming 3½ per cent. war loan would be £1,909 million. The cost of redeeming all undated Government securities would be £3,220 million.

Personal Debt

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the adult average per capita personal debt, not including mortgages; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 12 April 1988]*: The adult average per capita stock of personal sector debt, excluding mortgages, is estimated to have been a little over £1,300 at the end of the third quarter 1987.

This figure includes debts of unincorporated businesses since these are part of the personal sector.

WALES

Farmers Union of Wales

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the president of the Farmers Union of Wales; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Peter Walker: I last met the president of the Farmers Union of Wales on Wednesday 10 February when we discussed the full range of issues of concern to the union.

Fishing

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimates of the yield of fishing rates in Wales are available to him.

Mr. Peter Walker: This information is not held centrally.

A548 (Shotton-Connah's Quay Bypass)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he estimates the start of the A548 Shotton to Connah's Quay bypass rail bridge; and what is *(a)* the target completion date, *(b)* its estimated cost and *(c)* the length of carriageway.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: These matters are for Clwyd county council, the local highway authority responsible for the scheme. I understand that the scheme is in progress.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the A548 Shotton to Connah's Quay bypass river crossing and completion of dualling will begin; what is the length of carriageway; and what is its estimated cost.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: These matters are for Clwyd county council, the local highway authority responsible for the scheme.

Voluntary Bodies (Grants)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those voluntary organisations, projects and bodies assisted by his Department with grant aid during the financial year 1986-87, together with the amount of grant in each case.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman shortly, and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Foreign Languages

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the non-European languages taught as foreign languages in Wales and list those secondary schools in which they are taught.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Japanese is taught to a group of sixth-formers, on an informal basis, at Heol Ddu comprehensive school, Mid Glamorgan, and is available as a nine-week module to fourth and fifth-formers in Ysgol Emrys ap Iwan, Clwyd. No other maintained schools teach non-European languages.

Education

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those primary schools in Wales where a language other than Welsh or English is employed as a language of instruction.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: There are no maintained primary schools in Wales where the language of instruction is a language other than Welsh or English.

Welsh Language

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has as to the numbers and proportion of primary school pupils in each Welsh county who *(a)* speak Welsh as their first language, *(b)* speak Welsh fluently as their second language, *(c)* speak some Welsh and *(d)* speak very little or no Welsh at all.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information is not collected centrally in the form requested. However, data in respect of primary school pupils, aged five and over, by home spoken language at September 1987 are as follows:

Pupils Who . . .

	speak Welsh at home		*do not speak Welsh at home but who can speak it with fluency*		*speak Welsh but not fluently*		*cannot speak Welsh at all*	
Welsh Counties	*Number*	*Proportion*	*Number*	*Proportion*	*Number*	*Proportion*	*Number*	*Proportion*
Clwyd	1,351	4·7	1,579	5·5	6,566	22·7	19,345	57·1
Dyfed	4,850	20·1	2,040	8·4	4,913	20·3	12,396	51·2
Gwent	37	0·1	452	1·4	127	0·4	31,620	98·1
Gwynedd	6,500	40·2	3,016	18·6	5,412	33·5	1,252	7·7
Mid Glamorgan	297	0·7	3,707	9·1	1,742	4·3	35,057	85·9
Powys	467	5·7	342	4·2	1,268	15·6	6,074	74·5
South Glamorgan	346	1·2	580	2·1	1,632	5·8	25,641	90·9
West Glamorgan	724	2·8	658	2·5	1,871	7·1	22,918	87·6

HOME DEPARTMENT

Public Service Broadcasting

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Government plans for public service broadcasting in the next decade.

Mr. Renton: We have it in mind to publish a White Paper within the next few months setting out proposals for the future of broadcasting, including public service broadcasting which will continue to play a major part in the broadcasting system in the 1990s.

Drug Trafficking

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of present national and international methods of control of the laundering of illegal drug trafficking money.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The powers to trace, freeze and confiscate the proceeds of drug trafficking in the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 provide an effective new weapon against drug trafficking and money laundering. Intelligence about the financial activities of suspected drug traffickers is now co-ordinated centrally in the national drugs intelligence unit. We recently signed an agreement with the United States on co-operation in this field, and we expect to conclude further such agreements this year. We are also active in discussions in the Council of Europe and the United Nations towards more effective international co-operation.

London Roads (Access)

Mr. Tebbit: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many weekends during *(a)* January, *(b)* February and *(c)* March, public access to roads in central London was restricted in order to allow demonstrations to take place; in each case to which roads access was impaired and for what period; and whether he expects such restrictions to increase during the summer months.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that, in relation to larger demonstrations, he issued directions enabling constables to stop or to divert vehicular and pedestrian traffic in central London on two weekends in each of January and February and on one weekend in March (when two separate directions were made). I have placed copies of the directions in the Library which give their

duration and which show the roads affected. The number of directions issued during the summer is expected to decrease.

Prevention of Terrorism

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to the actions taken following the arrests under the Prevention of Terrorism Act of (i) Dierdre Whelan, (ii) Patrick Shanahan, (iii) Tina Smith, (iv) Pamela Kane, (v) James Keegan, (vi) Hugo Reavey and (vii) David Kane and with particular reference to *(a)* the length of time each was held prior to any charge, *(b)* which of them were released bail having been charged, *(c)* which of them were released without charge, *(d)* what criminal charges have been preferred and against whom and *(e)* at what stage each was allowed to see a solicitor.

Mr. Hurd: No charges were brought against any of those named. Martina Smith was told at the start of her detention that she could have access to a solicitor and David Kane saw a solicitor within 24 hours of his detention. Deirdre Whelan, Patrick Shanahan, Pamela Kane, Joseph Keegan and Hugo Reavey were all allowed access to a solicitor after they had been detained for 48 hours.

Bail Hostels

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many bail hostels there are in England and Wales.

Mr. John Patten: There are 16 approved bail hostels in England and Wales and a further 85 approved probation/bail hostels, the majority of which provide places for persons on remand.

Bail Beds

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many bail beds are currently available to the courts in England and Wales.

Mr. John Patten: There are 248 places available in approved bail hostels and a further 1,593 in approved probation/bail hostels, the majority of which are available to persons on remand.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many remand prisoners occupied a place in a bail hostel during *(a)* 1986 and *(b)* 1987 in England and Wales.

Mr. John Patten: In 1986, at all approved probation/bail and bail hostels in England and Wales, 410 places were occupied on average each month by persons on remand; the corresponding figure for 1987 was 538. Based on an average length of stay of nine weeks it is estimated that 2,378 persons on remand occupied approved hostel places in 1986 and 3,120 occupied places in 1987.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many remand prisoners who were resident in bail hostels absconded during *(a)* 1986 and *(b)* 1987;

(2) how many remand prisoners who were resident in bail hostels committed a further offence whilst on bail during *(a)* 1986 and *(b)* 1987.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Immigration

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make a statement concerning the outcome of his Department's pilot study into the use of DNA fingerprinting for the identification of genuine applicants for immigration into the United Kingdom; and if he will provide statistics evidencing the use of DNA testing techniques during the pilot study, and the results.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. Friend expects to place a copy of the report of the pilot trial in the Library shortly. The report will include statistical information about the outcome of DNA tests during the trial.

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passengers arriving at Heathrow airport from abroad during 1987 were new arrivals to the United Kingdom; and how many were referred for medical examination on arrival.

Mr. Renton: Information about the total number of new arrivals is not available, but in 1987 14,387 passengers were given leave to enter for settlement on first arrival at Heathrow airport. In the 12 months 1 April 1986 to 31 March 1987 34,708 passengers at Heathrow were referred by immigration officers for medical examination. This figure includes other categories in addition to settlement cases. The figures for 1987 are not yet available.

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many immigration officers are employed at Heathrow airport; and how many are medically qualified.

Mr. Renton: On 29 February 1988, 533 immigration officers were in post at Heathrow airport. As far as I am aware, none is medically qualified.

Heathrow Airport (Medical Checks)

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the procedure for checking the medical condition of passengers arriving from abroad at Heathrow airport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Immigration officers have the power to refer for medical examination any passenger subject to control who *(a)* intends to remain in the United Kingdom for more than six months; *(b)* mentions health or medical treatment as a reason for his visit; *(c)* appears not to be in good health; or *(d)* appears to be mentally or physically abnormal.

Immigration officers also have discretion, which the immigration rules require them to exercise sparingly, to

refer for examination in any other case. Medical examinations are conducted by port medical inspectors, appointed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services.

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passengers on flight BA 222 from Islamabad which arrived at Heathrow airport on the evening of Monday 11 April were referred for medical examination; and how many received subsequent treatment.

Mr. Renton: Twenty-four, none of whom was referred for treatment as a result.

Prisoners (Suicide)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female prisoners in police or court cells committed suicide between 1 April 1987 and 31 March; and how many of these were on remand.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There were no deaths in police or magistrates court cells, between 1 April 1987 and 31 March 1988, in which a coroner's inquest returned a verdict of suicide. There were three instances where an open verdict was returned. In a further case the inquest is pending. None of these prisoners was on remand.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female prisoners committed suicide between 1 April 1987 and 31 March 1988; and how many of these were on remand.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Verdicts of suicide have been returned on 31 inmates who died in prison department establishments in England and Wales between 1 April 1987 and 31 March 1988. Thirty of these were male, of whom 18 were on remand; the one female was also on remand. Inquests are yet to be held on eight other inmates (all male, four of whom were on remand) who die in prison department custody during the period in question and whose deaths are thought to have been suicide.

South Africa (Trade Ban)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent action Her Majesty's Government have taken to secure the return to the United Kingdom of the four business men accused of smuggling goods to South Africa in breach of a trade ban, who broke their undertaking, given as a condition of bail, to return to the United Kingdom to face those charges; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The United Kingdom has no extradition treaty with South Africa, and therefore no means of securing the return of these men. Bail of £400,000 has been forfeited.

Civil Defence

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to review the state of Britain's civil defence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Civil defence arrangements are kept under continual review.

Prisons (Contract Provision)

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Government will reply to the fourth report of the Select Committee on Home Affairs on contract provision of prisons, published on 6 May 1987, HC 291.

Mr. Douglas Hurd: I have today written to my hon. Friend setting out the Government's response to the report. I have mentioned in particular my intentions, which I announced to the House on 30 March, at columns 1083-85, as part of the measures I am taking to deal with the current and projected growth of the prison population, to invite the private sector to make proposals for the faster provision of urban remand facilities and open prisons; to publish a Green Paper and set up a consultancy on the scope for involving the private sector in all aspects of the remand system; and to examine the possibility of the private sector providing and managing secure bail hostels. I am arranging for a copy of my letter to be placed in the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

RUC (Chief Constable)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his reasons were for asserting recently that the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary was to meet his Garda counterpart.

Mr. Tom King: The Chief Constable of the RUC and the Commissioner of the Garda Siochana attended a meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference on 25 March.

Sinn Fein

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has any proposals to seek to limit Sinn Fein's access to the broadcasting media in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Stanley: No, but all measures which might assist the combating of terrorism are kept under review.

Woodland Grant Scheme

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what are the present rates of grant for planting conifers and broadleaves; whether he proposes to amend the woodland grant scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply given to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) on 23 March 1988, at columns *167-68*.

RUC Code of Conduct

Mr. Charles Wardle: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will place a copy of the Royal Ulster Constabulary code of conduct in the Library.

Mr. Tom King: The guidance to officers entitled "Professional Policing Ethics" has been incorporated in chapter 1 of the RUC manual which is issued to each member of the force. The Chief Constable has agreed that

this guidance should be publicly available. At his request, therefore, I have today placed a copy in the Library of both Houses and copies are available in the Vote Office.

Sea Fish Industry Authority

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the sum allocated to the Sea Fish Industry Authority for boat building grants in each year since 1984-85 *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* at 1987 prices.

Mr. Gummer: The information requested is as follows:

	1984-85	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Cash terms	7·02	8·91	10·00	15·10
At 1987 prices	7·97	9·58	10·42	15·10

Chernobyl (Press Conference)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which newspapers and other publications were invited to his Ministry's press conferences on Chernobyl on *(a)* 21 April 1987 and *(b)* 21 March 1988.

Mr. MacGregor: No press conferences on Chernobyl were held by my Ministry on 21 April 1987 and 21 March 1988. However, officials did give background briefings, as they do from time to time on various issues.

EMPLOYMENT

Institute of Personnel Management (Exhibition)

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the 75th anniversary of the work of the Institute of Personnel Management in the Upper Waiting Hall; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fowler: The Institute of Personnel Management has invited me to open this exhibition on 23 May, and I have accepted.

ACAS (North-West Branch)

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in how many cases the north-west branch of ACAS has been involved or instrumental in producing a settlement.

Mr. Nicholls: I understand from the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service that in 1987, the latest complete calendar year for which figures are available, ACAS north-west region was involved in conciliation in 245 disputes. A settlement, or progress towards a settlement, was achieved in 209 (85.3 per cent) of these cases.

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has about the employment and industrial background of serving members of the north-west region ACAS board.

Mr. Nicholls: ACAS has no regional boards.

TRANSPORT

Thrapston Bypass

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when construction work on the A1/M1 link Thrapston bypass will start.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Construction work on this section is programmed to start towards the end of this year.

Concessionary Bus Fares

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department has monitored changes arising in the provision of concessionary bus fares for children arising from the Transport Act 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: My Department sought information from local authorities on a voluntary basis in 1986-87 about their concessionary fares schemes. The information supplied is still being analysed. But the preliminary indications confirm that, as I stated in reply to the hon. Member's similar question on 20 July 1987, some local authorities have used the powers introduced under the Transport Act 1985 to provide for new or improved concessionary fares for children, but in most cases there has been no change.

Public Service Vehicle Licence Test

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the average waiting time for a public service vehicle licence test in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Orkney and *(c)* Shetland.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The average waiting time for public service vehicle driving tests in Scotland is five weeks. Arrangements for tests on Orkney and Shetland depend on the level and incidence of local demand. On average the waiting time for tests on the islands is about eight weeks.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many applications for public service vehicle tests were received in 1987 from *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Orkney and *(c)* Shetland.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This information is not readily available. Some 2,711 test appointments were booked in Scotland in 1987. Four tests were conducted in Orkney and 16 in Shetland.

Tourist Coaches

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the impact of tourist coaches on traffic movement on roads for which he is responsible near the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Responsibility for all roads in the vicinity of the Palace of Westminster rests with Westminster city council as local highway authority.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department has taken to mitigate the effects of tourist coaches in central London traffic.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Traffic management and the provision of parking for tourist coaches in central London

are primarily the responsibility of London borough councils as highway and planning authorities. We encourage local authorities and private bodies to improve existing facilities and provide additional ones.

We issued a report on tourist coaches in London in 1986. Copies were placed in the Library of the House. More recently we have co-operated with the Bus and Coach Council, Westminster city council, the Metropolitan police and the London tourist board in developing a code of practice. This was launched on 2 March. It should lead to better routeing and parking of coaches.

London Regional Transport

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the current salaries and other remuneration of board members of London Regional Transport.

Mr. David Mitchell: Current annual salaries of the board members of London Regional Transport are as follows:

	Salary £	*Time Commitment*
Chairman		
Sir Keith Bright	64,000	Full time
Full-time Members		
Dr. Tony Ridley	60,000	Full time
Mr. John Telford Beasley	55,000	
Mr. Michael Marsh	60,000	
Part-time Members		
Sir Neil Shields	18,000	2 days per week
Mr. Keith Brown	5,500	Half day per week
Miss Eileen Cole		
Dr. Stephen Glaister		
Mrs. Helen Robinson		
Miss Patricia Steel		
Mr. Roy Thomas		

Mr. Marsh and Mr. Thomas take up their appointments on 18 April.

The total remuneration of board members in 1986-87 is published in the corporation's annual report and accounts for that year, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The corresponding figures for 1987-88 will appear in that year's annual report and accounts, which will be published shortly.

British Rail

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the Government's expenditure on public service obligation grant to British Rail during each year since 1979; and what was the percentage in each of the British Rail's regions.

Mr. David Mitchell: The figures for central Government support for the British Railways Board taken from the final claims for grant in compensation for the public service obligation under EC regulation 1191/69 and section 3 of the Railways Act 1974 in respect of the years since 1979 are as follows:

	£ million
1979	485·1
1980	575·9
1981	749·2
1982	817·0
1983	853·6
1984-85	1,065·9
1985-86	820·0
1986-87	712·9
1987-88	794·7

1984-85 is a 15-month period reflecting a change in the British Railways Board financial year. The figures for 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88 remain provisional; final claims have not been agreed. All figures are cash.

The public service obligation grant is not paid on the basis of allocation between British Rail's regions and it is not possible to provide a percentage breakdown between regions.

Road Signs

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will state the total public expenditure on road signs on trunk roads and motorways in England in each year since 1966 at outturn and 1986-87 prices.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This information is not readily available and can be provided only at disproportionate costs.

Rail Safety

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list, separately for freight and passenger trains, all the reported occasions in the last 10 years when locomotive drivers have passed signals at danger; and in which of those incidents wheel slide has been a contributory factor.

Mr. David Mitchell: Signals passed at danger by train drivers are reported to this Department only if a notifiable accident results. The number of collisions attributed to drivers passing signals at danger over the past 10 years is as follows. The numbers involving freight trains and passenger trains separately are not readily available, nor are the numbers in which wheel slide has been a contributory factor.

Collisions caused by train crews passing signals at danger

Year	*Number of collisions*
1978	1
1979	4
1980	6
1981	7
1982	5
1983	7
1984	5
1985	4
1986	4
1987	[1]7

[1] The figures for 1987 are provisional at this time.

Motor Cyclists

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of serious leg injuries sustained by motor cyclists in road traffic accidents result in disability.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 29 March 1988]:* Just before Easter, the hon. Gentleman asked what

proportion of serious leg injuries sustained by motor cyclists in road traffic accidents resulted in disabilities. The information was not available at the time. I said that I would write.

A transport and road research laboratory study at a hospital accident and emergency department showed that about half of motor cyclists sustaining serious leg injuries were still suffering disability six months after their accident. As this study was at one hospital only, this figure may not be representative of the national situation.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Teaching Hospitals

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has received representations about the funding of the teaching hospitals as part of the National Health Service review.

Mr. Moore: Yes, and we shall bear in mind the importance of medical teaching and research.

West Middlesex University Hospital

Sir Barney Hayhoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether the detailed plans for the redevelopment of the West Middlesex University hospital, set out in the Minister for Health's letter dated 5 March 1987 to the right hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth, remain generally valid; and if any amendments have been made;

(2) when proposals for the redevelopment of the West Middlesex University hospital were submitted for approval by Her Majesty's Treasury and his Department; and when he expects that approval will be given;

(3) what action he has taken with reference to the approval of phase one of the new West Middlesex University hospital since the debate on the National Health Service on 26 November 1987.

Mrs. Currie: The plans outlined in my right hon. Friend's letter related to the total redevelopment of the hospital, which would cost some £47 million.

The submission on the phase 1 redevelopment of the West Middlesex University hospital is under consideration. A revised submission was received in June 1987. Further information on the proposals has been required, some re-costing work has been necessary, and there have been detailed discussions with the health authority about the provision proposed for elderly mentally ill patients. Proposals of this magnitude will also require Treasury approval. Decisions will be taken as soon as possible.

Detailed work on later phases—which will require separate submissions—is still in progress at the regional health authority.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many people will receive reduced housing benefit as a result of the changes in social security in April;

(2) how many people who lose entitlement to housing benefit in April are families with children.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 18 December 1987 at columns *916-18*. This continues to be the most up-to-date information available.

Maternal Deaths

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many *(a)* direct, and *(b)* indirect maternal deaths in England in each year between 1976 and 1978 occurred in National Health Service hospitals without consultant obstetric units; and how many were associated with anaesthesia.

Mrs. Currie: In 1976-78 there were 30 direct maternal deaths directly due to anaesthesia in England and Wales. There were also a further 10 deaths where the administration of anaesthesia made a contribution, and of these deaths five were direct and five were indirect maternal deaths. Information on where death occurred and the type of obstetric unit is not available.

Westfield House, Bradford

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the estimated cost of repairing the damage done to the reception area of the Westfield house office of his Department in Bradford, including the replacement of reinforced glass screens; when the office will reopen; what arrangements have been made to refer callers to other DHSS offices in Bradford; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The cost of repairing the damage to the public area, including replacement of reinforced glass screens, has been estimated at between £1,700 and £2,000. It is hoped that the work will be completed in time for the office to reopen to the public by the beginning of the week commencing Monday 18 April. Callers are being directed to Bradford south local office which is situated about one mile away. A notice on the public entrance sets out the alternative arrangements, which have also been publicised in the local press. The public caller office at Shipley is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays and extra staff have been deployed to deal with inquiries.

Performance-related Payments

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to his answer of 12 April to the hon. Member for Wakefield, what policy objective is served by maintaining the confidentiality of performance-related payments to Health Service general managers.

Mr. Newton: It respects the position of those individuals who do not wish the awards they have received to be made public.

Eye Tests and Dental Examinations

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the answer of Tuesday 12 April, how many of the 206,524 eye tests and 652,660 dental examinations were undertaken free of charge in 1986; and for which additional categories charges will be levied under terms of the Health and Medicines Bill.

Mr. Newton: All the 206,524 sight tests and the 662,660 dental examinations carried out in Trent region in 1986 under the general optical and dental services were free of

charge. Once enacted the Health and Medicines Bill will permit charges to be made for dental examinations and will confine the NHS sight test to specified groups.

As regards dental examinations, these will continue to be free for children and young people under 18, full-time students under 19, expectant and nursing mothers and people on a low income. This will account for nearly half of the dental examinations provided in the future.

As regards sight testing, a free NHS sight test will continue for children under 16, full-time students under 19, the registered blind and partially-sighted people on a low income and also, as I announced in the House on 14 April 1988, those with diabetes or glaucoma who are referred by the doctor managing their condition. It is estimated that these groups account for over one third of sight tests.

Single Payments (Sunderland)

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many outstanding claims for single payments there were at *(a)* Dunn house and *(b)* Phoenix house in Sunderland on 11 April.

Mr. Portillo: There were 3,118 single payment claims outstanding at Dunn house (Sunderland, North office) and approximately 7,000 at Phoenix house (Sunderland, South office) on 11 April 1988.

Income Support (Sunderland)

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many assessments for income support were outstanding at *(a)* Dunn house and *(b)* Phoenix house in Sunderland on 11 April.

Mr. Portillo: The exercise to convert supplementary benefit payments to income support was completed in both these offices by 11 April.

Richmond Terrace (Ministerial Cars)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to ensure that ministerial cars are not parked outside his Department's new headquarters in Richmond terrace in such a way as to cause an obstruction to those seeking to enter the building; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I am not aware of a general problem resulting from the existing arrangements although current work to complete the building sometimes causes some necessary short-term disruption to Ministers, staff and visitors to the building.

Income Support Regulations

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if Her Majesty's Government will take steps to ensure that any British citizens or overseas nationals, settled in the United Kingdom, who visit Pakistan for urgent family reasons arising from the recent explosion disaster in Pakistan are not penalised on their return under the provisions of the new social security regulations, relating to the effect on benefit entitlements of time spent outside the United Kingdom.

Mr. Portillo: The new Income Support (General) Regulations 1987 and the Income Support (General) Amendment Regulations 1988 carry forward into income support the former rules for the payment of supplementary pensions and allowances during absences abroad. Under these rules certain people who are not required to be available for work for income support purposes and who temporarily go abroad remain entitled to income support for the first four weeks of absence. If the absence abroad results in a break in entitlement, that break will lead to the immediate loss of any transitional addition of less than £10, and to the loss, after eight weeks, of transitional additions of £10 or more. In the case of certain unemployed couples, breaks in entitlement of eight weeks or more will lead to the loss of the higher (£15) earnings disregard.

If a husband and wife go abroad and the wife is widowed while in Pakistan she will be entitled to widow's payment if she returns to the United Kingdom within four weeks of her husband's death.

We have no plans to change these rules.

Social Security Provisions

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will arrange for British citizens or overseas nationals settled in the United Kingdom, who are dependent on benefit, to be able to apply for help towards their expenses to travel to Pakistan for urgent family reasons, arising from the recent explosion disaster in Pakistan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: It would be inappropriate to make provision in this way since the social security system is not, and was not previously, designed for this purpose.

Foreign Visitors (Medical Examinations)

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the variety of medical conditions found amongst those passengers who arrived at Heathrow airport during 1987 and were referred for examination on arrival; and how many were refused entry on medical grounds.

Mrs. Currie: The principal port medical officer at Heathrow has listed the following medical conditions as found amongst passengers arriving at Heathrow airport between 1 April 1986 and 31 March 1987 referred to the health control unit:

Tuberculosis
Malaria
Pyrexia of unknown origin
Hepatitis
Food poisoning
Dysentery
Diarrhoea
Typhoid
Meningitis
Salmonella
Gastroenteritis
Glandular fever
Bornholm's Disease
Chicken pox
Shingles
Cardiac Arrest/Failure
Renal Colic/Failure
Accidents
Drug Abuse
Obstetric Emergency
Attempted Suicide
Abdominal Pain
Urine Retention
Non Hodgkins Lymphoma

Anxiety State
Malnutrition
Hypoglycaemia
Tachycardia
Gastritis
Chest Pains
Appendicitis
Cancer
Neuritis
Acute Asthmatic Attack
Acute Allergic Condition
Emphysema
Tonsillitis
Dehydration
Acute Back Pain
Mental Illness

In 1987, the number of those refused entry on medical grounds at Heathrow airport was 41.

Social Fund

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will redistribute social fund budgets between the local office at Liverpool, West Derby, and Liverpool, Edge Hill.

Mr. Scott: Following the announcement of social fund allocations in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) on 4 November 1987, at columns *774-81*, the local office at Liverpool, Edge Hill has assumed from the local office at Liverpool, West Derby the responsibility of serving the residents of the postal district Liverpool 13. Accordingly, the allocation to Liverpool, West Derby has been reduced proportionately and the money reallocated to Liverpool, Edge Hill. The new allocations are as follows:

	Grants budget £	*Loans budget* £
Liverpool, West Derby	70,780	167,504
Liverpool, Edge Hill	258,534	714,113

Income Support

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether women who have left the marital home for fear of violence will be excluded from income support where their share of the marital home exceeds £6,000; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: It is not our policy to deny income support to the partner who has left the marital home in the event of marital breakdown simply because of the capital value of her or his share in the home. We shall propose amending regulations as soon as possible so as to be able to disregard the person's interest in the property until its value can be realised. In the interim, arrangements have been made to pay such claimants the amounts that they would have received had income support been payable.

National Health Service Administrators

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish all annual figures available to him on the numbers and ratio of administrators to total staff in the National Health Service.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 24 February 1988]:* Such information as is available is shown in the table.

30 September: England[1]

Year	*Wholetime Equivalents*[2] *Administrative and Clerical*[3]	*Total Directly Employed*[4]	*Administrative and clerical as percentage of tatal directly employed*[5]
1971	70,400	629,500	11·2
1972	74,300	655,000	11·3
1973	77,100	664,100	11·6
1974	82,800	675,800	12·2
1975	91,900	719,500	12·8
1976	98,500	744,400	13·2
1977	99,000	749,500	13·2
1978	100,300	761,500	13·2
1979	103,000	775,300	13·3
1980	105,400	793,800	13·3
1981	108,800	824,400	13·2
1982	108,800	830,600	13·1
1983	110,000	829,400	13·3
1984	110,300	819,300	13·5
1985	111,000	812,900	13·7
1986	111,400	801,600	13·9

[1] Because of the 1974 NHS reorganisation figures prior to 1974 are not consistent with those for 1974 and later years.
[2] Figures are not independently rounded to the nearest (100) one hundred wholetime equivalents.
[3] Includes general managers.
[4] Includes medical and dental locums and nursing and midwifery agency staff. Not adjusted to take account of the reduction in nurses working hours (from 40 to 37·5 per week) during 1980-81. Reduction in total staff since 1983 is mainly due to effects of competitive tendering of ancillary staff services.
[5] Percentages calculated on unrounded figures.

ENVIRONMENT

Lower Don Valley

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what type of partnership was recommended for the regeneration of the Lower Don Valley in the Coopers and Lybrand report, jointly sponsored by local and central government.

Mr. Trippier: The Coopers and Lybrand report, which was jointly sponsored by the Government, local business and Sheffield city council, considered a range of management mechanisms including an urban development corporation. The preferred option was for an urban regeneration project, but this could not guarantee the necessary resources to secure the regeneration of the lower Don Valley. An urban development corporation would bring that certainty.

Water (Nitrate Content)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many cases have been reported in the past 12 months in the Nottingham area of water containing nitrate in excess of the European Economic Council recommended levels.

Mr. Moynihan: One water supply serving the Hucknall area of Nottingham has marginally exceeded the EC drinking water directive limit for nitrate during the last 12 months. Although this level of nitrate is not considered to be a public health risk, the water authority is now drawing up a programme of action which will ensure compliance with the directive.

Water Quality

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the maximum penalty for non-compliance with European Community law relevant to water quality standards in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Moynihan: European Community measures relevant to water quality standards are contained in directives which are implemented in member states through national legislation. In the United Kingdom the individual laws contain their own penalty provisions.

British Standards Institution

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to implement the recommendations of the Bennett committee published in 1979 in respect of the separation of the standards-making function of the British Standards Institution and procedures for the certification of innovative products.

Mr. Trippier: Following consideration of the Bennett report, the Government concluded in 1980 that the Agrement Board (now the British Board of Agrement), which issues certificates primarily for innovative building products, should remains independent. That remain our view.

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the overlap between the roles of the British Board of Agrément and the British Standards Institution.

Mr. Trippier: Under an agreement reached between the chairman of the BSI and the chairman of the BBA in April 1983, the BBA offers

"to assess materials, products, systems and techniques for Agrément Certification when there is no relevant British Standard or, if a relevant British Standard exists, when the subject of the certificate:

(a) contains some innovative element of manufacture or use and has a level of performance in use at least as good as that of the material, product, system or technique complying with the British Standard, or

(b) has a performance in use which is substantially better than that of the material, product, system or technique complying with the British Standard."

The agreement goes on to say that the

"BBA will not renew or maintain existing Agrément Certificates once a product or system is fully covered by amendments or revision of existing British Standard specifications or by new British Standard specifications."

A joint BSI/BBA liaison committee meets regularly, under an independent chairman, to resolve any problems as they arise.

Unused Sites

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the unused sites owned by public bodies within the district of Corby, together with their owners and sizes in acres.

Mr. Trippier: Registers of public bodies' land which is unused or underused are compiled and maintained by the Secretary of State under section 95 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. The following sites are currently entered on the register for the district of Corby:

Corby District Council

Owner/location	*Size (in acres)*
British Steel Corporation	
Iron and Steelworks, Corby works	1·4
Timber stores road one, Corby works	1·2
Ex-steelworks buildings, Corby works	5·6
Training centre, Corby works	2·6
Northamptonshire County Council	
Bears lane junction, Weldon	1·4
Oakley road roundabout, Corby	2·4
Rear of Tresham college, Corby	2·9
Rowlett road, Corby	12·5
Oakley road roundabout, Corby	3·0
Part of Earlstrees playing field, Corby	8·8
Commission for the New Towns	
Gretton brook road, Corby	8·9
Causeway road, Corby	3·4
Causeway road, Corby	6·9
Causeway road, Corby	3·7
Land off Macadam road, Corby	11·7
Gretton brook road, Corby	8·6
Brunel road, Corby	5·2
Hunters road, Weldon	1·4
Land in Great Oakley village	27·2
Land in Great Oakley village	6·1
George street, Corby	1·2
Pywell road, Corby	2·0
Pywell road, Corby	1·4
Shelton road, Corby	1·4
Shelton road, Corby	4·5
Shelton road, Corby	3·2
Sondes road, Corby	6·7
Sondes road, Corby	9·7
Sondes road, Corby	7·1
Shelton road, Corby	5·0
Shelton road, Corby	11·8
Saxon way east, Oakley Hay	6·3
Saxon way east, Oakley Hay	2·8
Saxon way east, Oakley Hay	2·4
Sedge close, Oakley Hay	4·1
Sedge close, Oakley Hay	5·4
Pywell road, Corby	2·0
Pywell road, Corby	2·4
Kettering road roundabout, Oakley Hay	1·2
Corby District Council	
Orchard close, Weldon	1·0
Church street, Weldon	2·6
Southfield road, Gretton	1·0
Rockingham road, Corby	1·6
Weldon road, Corby	5·0
Geddington road, Corby	1·0
Ennerdale road, Corby	6·5
Saxon way, Oakley Hay	41·6
"The heavy end", Weldon road, Corby	201·4
Longhills slag bank site, Weldon	22·5
Ex-British steel site, Weldon road, Corby	24·8
Oxford Regional Health Authority	
Willow brook road, Corby	4·0

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the unused sites owned by public bodies within the district of East Northamptonshire, together with their owners and sizes in acres.

Mr. Trippier: Registers of public bodies' land which is unused or underused are compiled and maintained by the Secretary of State under section 95 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. The following sites are currently entered on the register for the district of East Northamptonshire:

East Northamptonshire district

Owner/location	*Size (in acres)*
Anglian water authority	
Northampton road, Rushden	30·5
Kings meadow lane, Higham Ferrers	15·8
Barnwell road, Oundle	1·2
Stanwick road, Raunds	3·5
British rail	
Ex-station site, King's Cliffe	11·0
Ex-branch line north of Fineshade	1·5
Ex-branch line north east of Fineshade	4·4
Ex-branch line east of Fineshade	10·7
Ex-branch line south east of Fineshade	5·0
Ex-branch line north west of King's Cliffe	2·2
Ex-branch line north east of King's Cliffe	8·5
Nassington goods yard	6·2
British steel corporation	
Kettering road, Islip	26·7
Northamptonshire county council	
Ex-railway land, Rushden	22·0
Ex-station yard, Higham Ferrers	2·0
Melloway school site, Keats way, Rushden	2·9
East Northants district council	
Newton road, Rushden	17·0
Bedford road, Rushden	10·4
Ditchford lane, Rushden	31·7
Midland road, Thrapston	3·9
Ashton road, Oundle	2·9
Wood lane, King's Cliffe	6·3
Eastfields, upper Queen street, Rushden	6·6
East midlands electricity board	
Allan road, Irthlingborough	8·5
Colleyweston road, King's Cliffe	1·6
Aldwincle road, Islip	5·7
Oxford regional health authority	
Rushden hospital, Wymington road, Rushden	1·5
Rushden hospital, Wymington road, Rushden	3·5

Ozone Layer

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to ban the use of chlorofluorocarbons.

Mr. Moynihan: We are in negotiation with our partners in the European Community on a proposed regulation that will bring into force the reductions in consumption of chlorofluorocarbons required by the Montreal protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer.

Thistlebrook Caravan Site

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to the effect of the Appeal Court's judgment that the Thistlebrook caravan site does not meet the requirements of the Caravan Sites Act 1986 on *(a)* the London borough of Greenwich and *(b)* local authorities generally; and what steps he is taking to clarify the situation.

Mrs. Roe: We have noted the Court of Appeal's Judgment in Greenwich LBC v. Powell. I understand that the London borough of Greenwich has made application to appeal. We must now await the outcome of that application.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, for each urban development corporation, the amount of money attracted in investment commitments the amount of public money spent.

Mr. Trippier: The information is as follows:

English urban development corporations	*Grant-in-aid (cumulative to 31 March 1988) £ million*	*Estimated private sector investment committed £ million*
Black country Development Corporation	2	0·2
London docklands Development Corporation	390	[1]3,000
Merseyside Development Corporation	168	68
Teesside Development Corporation	5	2
Trafford park Development Corporation	10	5
Tyne and Wear Development Corporation	4	5

Note: Figures over £½ million shown to nearest £ million.
[1] (approx).

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, for each urban development corporation the amount of loans outstanding.

Mr. Trippier: The only English urban development corporation with outstanding borrowing at present is Merseyside development corporation, amounting to £785,000.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he has taken, or plans to take, to ensure that motorists are given full information on the availability of lead-free petrol at filling stations in their areas.

Mr. Moynihan: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) on 22 March at column *58*.

Toad Tunnels

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many additional toad tunnels have been constructed since May 1987.

Mr. Moynihan: I am pleased to report the recent construction of a further toad tunnel at Stamford Bridge, near York.

London Residuary Body

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment pursuant to his reply of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *277*, if he will state the total amount owed to the London residuary body by Government Departments, what are the subjects of the discussions between the London residuary body about his Department.

Mr. Chope: The total amount owed to the London residuary body (LRB) by Government Departments will not be known until all final audited claims for grants and subsidies have been submitted by the LRB to the

appropriate Departments. Discussions between Departments and the LRB are continuing and good progress towards settlements is being made.

My Department has regular meetings with the LRB to discuss a wide range of issues.

Hampstead Heath

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his reasons for agreeing to the transfer of Hampstead heath to the charge of the City of London corporation.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend has not yet reached a conclusion on the proposal submitted on 30 March by the London residuary body that its functions, properties, rights and liabilities in respect of Hampstead heath be transferred to the corporation of the City of London.

Pakistan (Visits)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if Her Majesty's Government will provide support for local authorities seeking to assist British citizens, or overseas nationals, settled in the United Kingdom, who are in financial hardship, wishing to visit Pakistan for urgent family reasons arising from the recent explosion disaster in that country; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The main means of central Government support for local authorities is by way of block grant, which is in aid of their services generally. It is entirely for local authorities to decide what provision to make for particular activities.

Local Valuation Panel Offices (Staffing)

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he proposes to take on the recommendations made by Messrs Ernst and Whinney, following its review of the staffing and procedures of local valuation panel officers.

Mr. Chope: I have today placed in the Libraries of the House a summary of the recommendations of the Ernst and Whinney report and the Government's proposals for action on them.

The report made a number of useful recommendations for improving administrative efficiency in local valuation panel offices and making more efficient use of staff. The Government accept the majority of these recommendations. Work is already in hand on the introduction of computer systems and a review of staffing will follow.

Rate Increases

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to the answer given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope), on 13 April, *Official Report*, column *127*, he will explain how the figure for local rate increases is made up; and if he will list in ascending order by class of authority the local rate poundages for all counties, boroughs and districts in England.

Mr. Chope: The local rate for a district or borough is made up from the rate charged by the district itself together with the average of parish precepts and special district expenses and precepts charged by certain other specialised bodies such as waste disposal authorities. It does not include the precepts charged by higher tier authorities, that is, county councils in the shires, police, fire and civil defence and transport authorities in metropolitan areas and London, and the Inner London education authority. A ranked list of the available information on local rates poundages in 1988-89 for districts and boroughs and precepts for county councils by class of authority is as follows.

Shire County Precepts 1988-89

	p
Hereford & Worcester	185·0
Norfolk	190·9
Kent	192·0
West Sussex	192·0
Berkshire	193·6
Shropshire	200·0
Hampshire	200·3
Surrey	202·7
Dorset	203·0
Lincolnshire	204·0
Suffolk	204·0
Cornwall	207·7
Devon	209·8
Staffordshire	215·0
Cambridgeshire	216·0
North Yorkshire	217·0
East Sussex	217·1
Gloucestershire	217·3
Wiltshire	219·3
Leicestershire	221·2
Somerset	224·0
Warwickshire	227·1
Isle of Wight	227·2
Buckinghamshire	227·7
Northamptonshire	229·0
Cheshire	232·0
Lancashire	234·0
Essex	235·0
Oxfordshire	238·6
Hertfordshire	240·4
Northumberland	[1]244·5
Durham	246·0
Bedfordshire	246·4
Avon	246·5
Nottinghamshire	253·0
Cumbria	260·0
Humberside	261·0
Cleveland	282·0
Derbyshire	297·5

[1] includes Northumbria Police Authority precept

London boroughs local rates 1988-89

	p
City of London	47·1
Inner London	
Kensington and Chelsea	4·2
Wandsworth	36·1
Westminster	51·0
Islington	89·7
Lambeth	92·3
Southwark	101·0
Camden	117·0
Tower Hamlets	123·2
Lewisham	131·8
Hammersmith and Fulham	133·3
Hackney	134·7
Greenwich	136·0

	p
Outer London	
Redbridge	130·8
Croydon	136·9
Bromley	140·9
Merton	151·0
Havering	157·4
Ealing	167·0
Bexley	168·3
Kingston-upon-Thames	169·4
Harrow	173·4
Barnet	177·6
Sutton	178·9
Richmond-upon-Thames	180·0
Barking and Dagenham	181·4
Enfield	185·9
Hillingdon	190·7
Waltham Forest	199·1
Haringey	214·7
Hounslow	221·1
Brent	249·0
Newham	259·7

Metropolitan districts local rates 1988-89

	p
Solihull	170·7
Trafford	201·2
Stockport	209·6
Dudley	211·0
Leeds	212·1
Sefton	217·8
Wolverhampton	218·3
Bolton	218·8
Sandwell	219·6
Birmingham	229·3
Oldham	239·0
Walsall	239·5
Wirral	242·7
Bury	244·7
Coventry	250·6
St. Helens	253·2
Gateshead	254·6
South Tyneside	254·6
Salford	257·6
Barnsley	261·1
Wakefield	262·3
Kirklees	263·0
Rotherham	263·7
Doncaster	264·5
Sunderland	264·6
Knowsley	265·9
Liverpool	268·2
Tameside	268·5
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	270·0
Wigan	270·2
Bradford	277·6
Rochdale	281·6
Calderdale	283·9
Manchester	285·6
North Tyneside	289·8
Sheffield	290·4

Shire Districts local rates 1988-89

	p
Spelthorne	4·2
Hove	4·9
Melton	5·8
Bath	7·0
Gillingham	7·0
Vale of White Horse	9·2
Basingstoke and Deane	9·7
Rochester on Medway	10·2
Slough	10·3
Cherwell	11·9
East Northampton	12·2
Wansdyke	12·4
Aylesbury Vale	12·7
South Northampton	13·0
Salisbury	13·0
East Cambridgeshire	13·5
South Cambridgeshire	14·1
Purbeck	14·3
Bracknell	14·8
York	14·8
Newbury	15·1
Wycombe	15·6
Hereford	15·8
West Dorset	15·9
Exeter	16·0
Windsor and Maidenhead	16·1
Huntingdonshire	16·1
South Buckinghamshire	16·4
South Herefordshire	16·4
Kingswood	16·5
Tewkesbury	16·7
West Oxfordshire	16·7
Colchester	16·8
South Oxfordshire	16·9
Runnymede	17·0
North Dorset	17·1
Tandridge	17·6
Charnwood	18·2
North Norfolk	18·5
Bridgnorth	18·6
South Kesteven	18·7
St. Edmundsbury	18·7
Brentwood	18·9
Maldon	18·9
Cotswold	18·9
Hinckley and Bosworth	18·9
Poole	19·0
Castle Point	19·0
Wellingborough	19·0
Taunton Deane	19·0
Tamworth	19·0

Local rates 1988-89

	p
East Devon	19·1
Blaby	19·3
South Shropshire	19·4
South Lakeland	19·5
Forest Heath	19·5
Chelmsford	19·6
Cheltenham	19·7
Rutland	19·9
Mendip	19·9
Chiltern	20·1
Chichester	20·1
Bromsgrove	20·2
Stafford	20·2
Breckland	20·6
Guildford	20·6
Kennet	20·6
Surrey Heath	20·7
South Staffordshire	20·8
Teesdale	20·9
Southend on Sea	21·0
Dacorum	21·0
Broadland	21·0
Fenland	21·1
Stratford-on-Avon	21·2
Erewash	21·3
Plymouth	21·5
Maidstone	21·5
Oadby and Wigston	21·5
Christchurch	21·6
Uttlesford	21·6
Test Valley	21·6

	p
West Somerset	21·6
Macclesfield	21·8
Gloucester	22·0
Boston	22·0
South Norfolk	22·2
Kings Lynn/West Norfolk	22·2
Broxbourne	22·3
North Bedfordshire	22·4
Epping Forest	22·5
Ryedale	22·5
Worthing	22·5
Lichfield	22·6
Wokingham	22·7
Restormel	22·7
Eden	22·7
Lewes	22·8
Sedgemoor	22·9
Mole Valley	22·9
Horsham	22·9
Weymouth and Portland	23·0
Braintree	23·0
Babergh	23·0
East Staffordshire	23·2
Cambridge	23·5
Rother	23·5
Eastleigh	23·5
Gosport	23·5
Mid Bedfordshire	23·8
Caradon	23·8
Alnwick	23·8
Havant	24·1
Berwick-upon-Tweed	24·2
South Somerset	24·2
North Shropshire	24·5
Kettering	24·6
Northavon	24·7
Ashford	24·7
Amber Valley	24·8
Derby	25·0
Bournemouth	25·0
Tendring	25·0
Forest of Dean	25·0
Rushmoor	25·0
Glanford	25·0
Wyre	25·0
Broxtowe	25·0
Mid Devon	25·1
Craven	25·1
Dover	25·2
Warwick	25·2
West Devon	25·3
Leominster	25·3
Wavenley	25·3
Hambleton	25·4
Elmbridge	25·4
Dartford	25·5
Corby	25·5
South Hams	25·6
Daventry	25·6
North Cornwall	25·7
West Wiltshire	25·8
East Hertfordshire	25·9
Copeland	26·0
Hastings	26·0
Southampton	26·0
Allerdale	26·1
Winchester	26·2
Holderness	26·2
Mid Suffolk	26·2
South Derbyshire	26·3
Gravesham	26·3
Shrewsbury and Atcham	26·3
Rugby	26·3
Rochford	26·5
St. Albans	26·5
Arun	26·5
Luton	26·6

	p
Eastbourne	26·6
Waverley	26·6
Teignbridge	26·7
East Dorset	26·7
Penwith	26·8
Tunbridge Wells	26·8
North Kesteven	26·8
Woodspring	26·9
North Devon	26·9
East Hampshire	26·9
Lancaster	27·0
Gedling	27·2
Carrick	27·3
Torridge	27·3
Wealden	27·3
Medina	27·3
South Holland	27·4
Tynedale	27·4
South Bedfordshire	27·7
Richmondshire	27·7
Congleton	27·8
Rushcliffe	27·8
Reading	28·0
Fareham	28·0
East Lindsey	28·1
Harborough	28·2
West Lancashire	28·6
North Hertfordshire	28·7
Canterbury	28·7
Three Rivers	28·9
Great Grimsby	29·0
Nottingham	29·0
Stoke-on-Trent	29·0
Woking	29·0
Derbyshire Dales	29·1
Sevenoaks	29·1
Reigate and Banstead	29·1
Swale	29·2
South Ribble	29·2
New Forest	29·3
Milton Keynes	29·6
Chester	29·6
Kerrier	29·6
Beverley	29·7
Fylde	29·7
Cannock Chase	29·9
Brighton	30·0
Portsmouth	30·0
Staffordshire Moorlands	30·0
Chorley	30·1
Worcester	30·2
Wychavon	30·3
Newcastle under Lyme	30·3
Stroud	30·4
Malvern Hills	30·4
Great Yarmouth	30·5
Oswestry	30·5
Carlisle	30·8
Watford	30·9
Lincoln	31·0
Hertsmere	31·1
Selby	31·2
Newark and Sherwood	31·3
Ellesmere and Neston	31·5
Vale Royal	31·5
West Lindsey	31·7
Scarborough	31·8
Tonbridge and Malling	31·9
Middlesbrough	32·2
Ribble Valley	32·7
Thanet	32·8
North Wiltshire	33·0
Mid Sussex	33·1
Ashfield	33·2
Halton	33·5
Castle Morpeth	33·5
Boothferry	33·8

	p
Crewe and Nantwich	33·9
Epsom and Ewell	33·9
Torbay	34·5
Northampton	34·6
Chesterfield	34·7
South Wight	34·9
Warrington	35·1
Barrow in Furness	35·2
North West Leicester	35·7
High Peak	35·8
Cleethorpes	35·8
Mansfield	36·0
Hart	36·3
Redditch	36·5
Suffolk Coastal	36·6
Peterborough	37·0
Stockton on Tees	37·2
Shepway	37·3
Wyre Forest	37·4
Welwyn Hatfield	38·5
Blackpool	38·5
Hartlepool	40·0
Harrogate	40·1
The Wrekin	40·2
Ipswich	40·5
Stevenage	41·3
Oxford	41·6
Bassetlaw	43·2
Chester le Street	43·8
Hyndburn	43·9
Nuneaton and Bedworth	44·1
Scunthorpe	45·0
Preston	45·1
Norwich	45·5
East Yorkshire	46·0
North East Derbyshire	46·2
North Warwickshire	46·3
Thurrock	46·9
Kingston-upon-Hull	47·0
Blackburn	47·0
Adur	47·3
Bristol	47·4
Crawley	48·0
Langbaurgh-on-Tees	48·4
Durham	49·0
Basildon	49·7
Bolsover	50·2
Thamesdown	51·1
Pendle	51·5
Leicester	52·3
Blyth Valley	54·0
Rossendale	54·2
Easington	55·5
Wansbeck	58·0
Darlington	62·2
Burnley	63·0
Derwentside	64·3
Sedgefield	66·6
Wear Valley	66·7
Harlow	92·9

Peanuts

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evidence he has of fatalities caused to the British wild bird population by aflatoxin poisoning; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* I am informed by the Government's advisers on nature conservation matters, the Nature Conservancy Council, that there is no evidence of fatalities caused to the British wild bird population by aflatoxin poisoning.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will take steps to ensure that aflatoxin-poisoned peanuts are not sold for use as wild bird food; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* Controls which exist for levels of contaminants in feeding-stuffs for domesticated animals and birds do not cover materials fed to wild birds. However, officials at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have been in contact with the Pet Food Manufacturers Association (PFMA) on this matter. The PFMA has recommended all its member companies not to use these peanuts—or any other material similarly contaminated—for feeding to wild birds or for any other purpose.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 18th April 1988

HOME DEPARTMENT

Justices Clerks

96. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to review the training of justices clerks in the juvenile courts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Training is provided for magistrates court clerks in the law, practice and procedures of juvenile courts, and such training is kept under review. Following a recent consultancy study on the future provision for staff training in magistrates courts, a unit is to be set up in the Home Office to promote and co-ordiate systematic appraisal of training needs. This will include training needs of staff working in the juvenile court.

Nationality Applications

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the recent steps he has taken to deal with the backlog in the processing of nationality applications at Lunar house.

Mr. Renton: Good progress is being made with the measures I announced on 16 February at column 863.

Prisoners (AIDS)

Mr. Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners are known to have contracted the AIDS virus while in custody;

(2) how many of those prisoners identified as HIV antibody positive have had VIR restrictions ordered by a medical officer or stamped on their records.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 13 April 1988, the prison population of England and Wales included 58 inmates reported as having been identified as HIV antibody positive; 170 such cases had been reported since central monitoring began in March 1985. There is no evidence that any of the inmates became infected while they were in prison custody. It is likely that once identified, all will have been made subject to viral infectivity restrictions. The nature of the restrictions will have varied from case to case.

Police, Probation and Prison Services (Expenditure)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the percentage increase in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* real terms since 1981-82 in expenditure on (i) the police service, (ii) the probation service and (iii) the prison service.

Mr. Hurd: The increase between expenditure in 1981-82 and estimated expenditure in 1987-88 for the three services, is:

	Cash terms per cent.	*Real terms per cent.*
Police	65·4	22·9
Probation	76·0	30·8
Prisons	65·0	23·0

Trevor Monerville

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish a judicial inquiry into the role of the Stoke Newington police in the arrest and detention of Trevor Monerville.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. The allegations about Mr. Monerville's treatment by the police are already being investigated under the supervision of the Police Complaints Authority. I understand that the investigating officers continue to be denied access to the relevant medical records by Mr. Monerville's legal representatives, and that this is causing difficulties to the investigation.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent by his Department on official hospitality in the financial year 1987-88.

Mr. Hurd: The amount spent by my Department on official hospitality in 1987-88 was about £44,000.

Horserace Betting Levy Board

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the names of the chairmen and directors of the Horserace Betting Levy Board; and what are their periods of office and their annual remunerations.

Mr. John Patten: The Horserace Betting Levy Board consists of a chairman, a deputy chairman and six members. Details are as follows.

Name	*First appointed*	*Present appointment expires*	*Present annual remuneration*
Sir Ian Trethowan, Chairman—appointed by Home Secretary[1]	1 October 1982	31 December 1990	[2]£28,250
Sir Patrick Meaney, Deputy Chairman—appointed by Home Secretary[1]	18 March 1985	28 February 1991	[2]£11,300
Mrs. A. McCurley, Member—appointed by Home Secretary[1]	1 April 1988	31 March 1991	[2]£8,475
Sir Thomas Pilkington, Bt Member—ex-officio (The Jockey Club)	n/a	n/a	(not paid by the Levy Board)

Name	First appointed	Present appointment expires	Present annual remuneration
Mr. M. E. Wates, Member-ex-officio (The Jockey Club)	n/a	n/a	(not paid by the Levy Board)
Sir Neville Macready, Bt CBE Member-ex-officio (The Jockey Club) (Chairman, Horserace Advisory Council)	n/a	n/a	[2](paid, £11,300 as Chairman of the Horserace Advisory Council)
Mr. A. Bruce, Member-ex-officio (Chairman, The Bookmakers' Committee)	n/a	n/a	[2](paid, £8,475 as Chairman of the Bookmakers' Committee)
The Lord Wyatt of Weeford, Member-ex-officio (Chairman, Horserace Totalisator Board)	n/a	n/a	(not paid by the Levy Board)

[1] Part-time appointments
[2] Paid out of the levy on bets on horse races.

Broadcasting Standards Council

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the name of the chairman of the Broadcasting Standards Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. Friend hopes to make an announcement on this matter shortly.

Immigration

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for leave to remain in Britain made by persons who arrived as visitors and subsequently married a settled person were outstanding at 1 April.

Mr. Renton: This information is not collected.

Lunar House, Croydon

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much overtime, expressed in hours and salary cost involved, have been worked by employees of the immigration and nationality department, at Lunar house, Croydon, since 1 January.

Mr. Renton: The number of hours worked as overtime by staff in the immigration and nationality department at Lunar house between 1 January 1988 and 31 March 1988 was 22,768. The estimated cost of the overtime for the period is £159,000.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passports were being held at Lunar house on 21 March and of these how many relate to *(a)* applications for citizenship and *(b)* applications for variation of leave.

Mr. Renton: It is not possible to say exactly how many passports are contained in the 45,000 unopened envelopes containing citizenship applications.

As of 11 April, there were 14,000 unopened packages containing passports and relating to applications for variations relating to leave; all these have been received since early March.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many letters that remained unsigned by his hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) as at 14 April relative to immigration matters.

Mr. Renton: No record is kept of the number of letters awaiting signature but best endeavours are always employed to complete such work as promptly as possible.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Government's views on DNA fingerprinting in immigration cases will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to a question from the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 15 April at column *256*.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons initially given temporary admission to Britain were subsequently given leave to remain in Britain on an indefinite basis in *(a)* 1985, *(b)* 1986, *(c)* 1987 and *(d)* since 1 January, respectively.

Mr. Renton: The information requested is not available centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Deportation

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of persons deported from Britain in 1985, 1986, 1987 and since 1 January, respectively.

Mr. Renton: Figures are available only for the whole of the United Kingdom. The annual totals for 1985 to 1987 were published on 17 March in table 14 of Home Office statistical bulletin "Control of Immigration: Statistics—Fourth Quarter and Year 1987" (issue 5/88), copies of which are in the Library. The figures for the first quarter of 1988 will be published in the next issue of the bulletin, in June.

Passports

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications were made for passports at each of the passport offices in 1985, 1986, 1987 and since 1 January, respectively.

Mr. Renton: The information is not available in precisely the form requested. The table shows the number of new passports issued and amendments made to existing passports in each of the last three years, and in the first

three months of this year. It is estimated that about 365,000 applications of all types were at the various stages of processing within the six United Kingdom passport offices at the end of March 1988.

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	[1] *1988*
London	576,595	593,313	493,653	131,153
Liverpool	538,437	661,355	655,191	204,167
Peterborough	472,669	577,096	580,133	173,332
Newport	435,192	503,317	514,390	181,106
Glasgow	162,338	191,164	190,400	45,167
Belfast	53,434	68,651	77,198	19,009
TOTAL	2,238,665	2,595,102	2,510,965	753,934

[1] January to March.

Gipsies (Trespass)

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has had representations about the lack of effectiveness in practice of the provisions of the Public Order Act 1986 in respect of preventing trespass by gipsies on unofficial sites; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have received a few letters from hon. Members and others about the power given to the police in section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986 to direct groups of trespassers to leave land they have occupied. The provision applies equally to all groups of itinerants. Its use is an operational matter for the senior police officer at the scene.

Police National Computer

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements have been made to allow the Guernsey police and the States of Jersey police access to the police national computer.

Mr. Hurd: The Guernsey police and the States of Jersey police have always been able to obtain information from, and to provide information for, the police national computer through individual United Kingdom forces at the discretion of the chief constable concerned. These arrangements have recently been reviewed, following requests by Guernsey police and the States of Jersey police. With the support of the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland), it has been agreed that these forces should henceforth have direct access to the PNC, through terminals situated in the islands. This facility, which will enable the forces to obtain information needed to carry out their duties and to enter information which may assist United Kingdom forces, will be subject to the same conditions as regards the protection of PNC information as apply to all other PNC users.

EC (Passports)

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received to date on the proposed introduction of the new European Economic Community British passport.

Mr. Renton: About 40 letters have been received from members of the public, either direct or through hon. Members, since the announcement on 11 February 1987 that the new form of British passport would be introduced from July 1988. In responding to concerns expressed by some correspondents we have made it clear that, although in a common format agreed in 1981 with other member states of the European Community, the new machine readable British passport remains a national one issued under the royal prerogative.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Education Support Grant

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, pursuant to the reply of 26 January, *Official Report*, column *137*, he will state *(a)* the names of the 22 local education authorities engaged in the pilot schemes receiving education support grant and *(b)* the amounts of education support grant paid in each financial year to date to each authority.

Mrs. Rumbold: Details of the local education authorities involved and the grant paid are as follows:

	Financial years		
	1985-86	*1986-87*	*1987-88*[1]
	£	£	£
Local education authority			
Inner London education authority	88,244	169,543	99,470
Coventry	112,060	121,605	95,939
Wigan	93,203	97,860	84,910
Dorset	114,750	169,610	87,500
Essex	232,395	220,500	178,448
Lancashire	43,074	62,930	42,840
Leicestershire	117,040	122,850	99,463
Oxfordshire	117,040	122,850	116,500
Somerset	117,040	122,823	99,400
Suffolk	78,260	83,048	66,500
East Midlands consortium[2]	176,448	216,246	92,736
Welsh joint education committee[3]	155,461	161,712	120,893

[1] Figures relate to claims paid to date. Those for 1987-88 are not final totals.

[2] Comprising Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Nottinghamshire Local Education Authorities.

[3] Comprising Clwyd, Dyfed, Gwent, Gwynedd, Powys, Mid-Glamoragan, South Glamorgan and West Glamorgan Local Education Authorities.

Polytechnics Governors

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the value of the selection contract for new polytechnics governors after the passing of the Education Reform Bill awarded to Tyzack and Partners; and whether this contract was awarded on the basis of open tender.

Mr. Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) on 3 March at column 626.

AIDS (Video)

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if the anti-AIDS video entitled "Your Choice for Life" was produced with the intention of general exhibition to schoolchildren of secondary school age;

(2) if he will take steps to make available to schools an alternative to the video entitled "Your Choice for Life";

and if he will undertake to include in such a film material stressing the importance of family life from the recent television broadcast entitled "Susie's Story";

(3) if he will make it his policy to ensure that schools choosing to exhibit the anti-AIDS video entitled "Your Choice for Life" give such preparation and follow-up as is necessary to encourage pupils to recognise the effectiveness of chastity before marriage and fidelity within it as the best protection against AIDS;

(4) what steps he has taken to ensure that the contents of his letter accompanying the anti-AIDS video entitled "Your Choice for Life" are known to the teachers concerned in the exhibition of the film.

Mr. Dunn: The video "Your Choice for Life" is designed for pupils aged 14-plus in a supervised setting. The accompanying users' guide for teachers emphasises the importance of follow-up discussion on the family, fidelity and chastity before marriage. Use of the package, and reinforcement of its messages, are matters for individual school's governing bodies, as my right hon. Friend's letter to the chairmen of governors made clear. It is open to governors to adopt alternative or supplementary materials, but the Government themselves have no plans to replace the video.

Personal, Social and Health Education

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what advice he proposes to give to schools on the role of personal, social and health education in relation to the national curriculum;

(2) what definition of personal, social and health education his Department uses for the purpose of advising schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: Personal and social education covers a range of areas of the curriculum, including health, careers, political and environmental education, and economic awareness. Elements of it will be included in what children learn through the national curriculum as cross-curricular themes in science and elsewhere. We acknowledge the valuable part which the provision of personal and social education can play in preparing young people for adult life.

Russian Language

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to the reasons why Russian is no longer taught at A-level in state schools in inner London; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Individual schools and local authorities decide which A-level subjects they wish to offer. The Government's policy for the diversification of modern language teaching in schools should, however, lead to an increase in the number of state schools offering Russian at both GCSE and A-level.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make it his policy to encourage the teaching of Russian in state schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: The statement of policy, "Modern Languages in the School Curriculum" published in January by the Secretaries of State for Education and Science and for Wales encouraged a greater diversity of languages offered in the school curriculum. Russian, together with German, Italian and Spanish, should be one of the languages to benefit most from this policy. The Government are providing grants for pilot projects in some local education authorities in England to prepare and implement plans for diversification.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he has taken to implement the proposals of the Annan report on the teaching of Russian.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Annan report entitled, "The Teaching of Russian" was published 28 years ago and made recommendations about examinations, teaching materials and pupil visits to the Soviet Union. These are matters for examining bodies and local education authorities.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was spent by his Department on official hospitality in the financial year 1987-88.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department spent £21,975·44 on official hospitality in the financial year 1987-88.

Medical Research

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the proposed expenditure on medical research for 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Jackson: The Government's planning provision for the Medical Research Council, which has responsibility for basic and clinical research, is as follows:

	£ million
1989-90	156
1990-91	152
1991-92	152

These figures will be subject to review in the normal way in this year's public expenditure survey.

The University Grants Committee funds medical school and university infrastructure through its general block grant to the universities, but it is not possible to identify sums going to medical research as such for the above years.

Nor are figures available in respect of medical research charities and the pharmaceutical industry, both of which provide major funding for medical research.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science to what extent *(a)* the Government and *(b)* the research councils give priority fundings to specific areas of medical research; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The Government fund basic and clinical medical research mainly by allocations to the Medical Research Council, made on the advice of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils.

The Government have earmarked funds for AIDS research, but it is generally for the Medical Research Council to determine its priorities for funding.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been, for each year since 1975, the expenditure on medical research at 1988 prices.

Mr. Jackson: Since 1975-76, Government funding of the Medical Research Council, which has responsibility for basic and clinical medical research, has been as follows:

(1988-89 constant prices)

	£ million
1975-76	104
1976-77	105
1977-78	98
1978-79	101
1979-80	105
1980-81	112
1981-82	143
1982-83	141
1983-84	143
1984-85	141
1985-86	139
1986-87	141
1987-88	146
1988-89	147

Note:
In 1981-82, £14 million (£20 million at 1988-89 prices) was transferred back to the science budget (MRC) from the Health Departments in respect of funds transferred from the science budget (MRC) to the Health Departments under the "Rothschild" arrangements of 1973-74 to 1975-76.

GCSE

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to increase the academic content of the GCSE; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The GCSE is intended to provide an appropriate balance between academic content and understanding and practical applications. It is for the GCSE examining groups and the Secondary Examinations Council to review syllabuses to secure such a balance in practice.

Information Technology Equipment

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will give details of the spending by local education authorities on information technology equipment over and above that spent by individual schools out of capitation allowances broken down by local education authority for each of the last five years for which information is available.

Mr. Dunn: The information requested is not available. Local authorities are required to submit returns of their total expenditure on educational equipment, but they are not required to break it down into types. Nor are they required to indicate how much came out of or was spent above the capitation sums allowed to schools. For 1988-89, the Government have approved expenditure of £19 million on "IT in Schools" for support through education support grants. All LEAs have received an allocation but no returns for actual expenditure are yet available. £8·5 million of this sum is available nationally for the purchase of microcomputer systems.

Free School Meals

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the numbers of children in each education authority in England, Scotland and Wales who received free school meals up to April because their parents were in receipt of family income supplement and at the discretion of the education authority, respectively.

Mr. Dunn: In October 1987, the latest date for which information is available, the total number of pupils in England authorised to receive free school meals because their parents were in receipt of family income supplement or at the discretion of the LEA were 128,394 and 115,806 respectively. Details relating to individual authorities are published annually in School Meals Statistics, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Information in respect of Scotland and Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales respectively.

Student Unions

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he proposes any changes in the arrangements by which student unions affiliate to, and fund, the National Union of Students.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Government recognise that many individual students do not wish to be represented by the National Union of Students; they are also concerned that taxpayers' money made available to student representative bodies should be used to provide services to students and not used for political campaigning. However, to limit freedom of association, by restricting the right of local student unions to affiliate to a national body, would raise complex legal issues. I conclude that it is first necessary to look at the arrangements for student union membership and the provision of services to individual students at both local and national levels.

To this end, I intend to gather on a sample basis up-to-date information on the organisation and cost of student services within institutions, on the legal status of local unions, and on the organisational and financial links between such unions and the NUS. I am confident that institutions and others will wish to co-operate with this survey; and I shall be glad to receive any information or suggestions which interested parties may wish to put forward. On the basis of the information I obtain, I will reach conclusions on the best action to take and will then consult all concerned about these conclusions.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Sri Lanka

87. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support Her Majesty's Government are prepared to give to the reconstruction of Sri Lanka after the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement.

Mr. Chris Patten: Britain has pledged a grant of £20 million in support of a three-year programme of reconstruction which was discussed at a special meeting of the Sri Lanka aid group in Paris last December. During my visit to Sri Lanka last month I signed an undertaking giving effect to this pledge and had useful discussions with Sri Lankan Ministers about its use.

Rajasthan

91. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance Her Majesty's Government have offered to India as a result of the famine in Rajasthan.

Mr. Chris Patten: In response to the 1987 monsoon failure, in Rajasthan and elsewhere, we have contributed:

£3 million to the Government of India/UNICEF water and sanitation programme;

£250,000 to Christian Aid for village tubewells;

£250,000 to Save the Children Fund and £53,000 to Oxfam for their respective drought relief programmes.

We are also considering a major bilateral village well-drilling project.

All these projects involve Rajasthan, though not exclusively.

Kampuchea

92. **Sir Russell Johnston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will now reconsider the provision of development assistance to Kampuchea.

Mr. Chris Patten: I see no reason at the present time to change our stance on aid to Cambodia. The Government's view is that, while it would be wrong in principle to give development aid to the current regime in Phnom Penh, we are nevertheless prepared to consider providing humanitarian assistance in the context of an internationally-organised relief effort. In addition, we shall continue to provide assistance for Cambodians seeking refuge in the camps along the Thai-Cambodian border.

Sub-Saharan Africa

93. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement regarding aid to sub-Saharan Africa.

Mr. Chris Patten: Sub-Saharan Africa continues to be a high priority recipient of British aid. In 1986 British aid to the region through bilateral and multilateral channels amounted to about £470 million.

Ethiopia

94. **Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to seek to visit Ethiopia.

Mr. Chris Patten: I hope to visit Ethiopia again later this month.

Rhodesia and Nyasaland

95. **Mr. Stanbrook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards the treatment of former members of the public service of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland whose pensions have not been taken over by the British Government.

Mr. Chris Patten: Pensions of public servants of the former federation are paid from the Central African pension fund and responsibility for awarding pension increases falls to the three former partner states (Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe). However, we are aware that the majority of federal pensioners have not received any pension increases under these arrangements. The British Government are ready to play their part as one of the guarantors of the fund in the talks which are taking place between the former partner Governments to find a solution to the problem.

UNICEF

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was Her Majesty's Government's contribution to UNICEF for each year from 1978-79 to 1987-88 at constant 1979 prices.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information is as follows:

Year	*Contributions at current prices (£ million)*			*1978-79 prices (£ million)*	
	General Fund	*Special Appeals*	*Total*	*General Fund*	*Total*
1978-79	4·500	0·664	5·164	4·5	5·2
1979-80	[1]5·800	1·751	7·551	5·0	6·5
1980-81	4·300	1·456	5·756	3·1	4·2
1981-82	5·900	0·083	5·983	3·9	3·9
1982-83	5·900	0·069	5·969	3·6	3·7
1983-84	6·000	0·025	6·025	3·5	3·5
1984-85	6·000	1·000	7·000	3·4	3·9
1985-86	[2]9·550	1·338	10·888	5·1	5·8
1986-87	3·250	6·570	9·820	1·7	5·0
1987-88[3]	7·000	8·223	15·223	3·4	7·5

[1] Special increase to mark International Year of the Child.

[2] £3·25 million, originally planned to be paid in April 1986 was paid in March.

[3] Figures for 1987-88 are provisional.

GOBI Programme

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has earmarked any of the Government's 1987-88 contribution for the GOBI programme; and for what purposes.

Mr. Chris Patten: We do not earmark our contributions to UNICEF specifically to GOBI measures (growth monitoring, oral rehydration therapy, breast feeding and immunisation). Through our contribution to UNICEF's general fund we support GOBI programmes and initiatives and some of our contributions to UNICEF's special appeals are primarily for these measures, including immunisation.

Cyclone Bola

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance he has made to the New Zealand people to assist in reconstruction in the aftermath of Cyclone Bola.

Mr. Chris Patten: On the advice of our high commissioner in Wellington we provided immediate assistance in the form of a cash grant of £40,000 for the New Zealand Government to allocate for urgent relief work.

Aid Recipients

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the six major recipients of funds from the Overseas Development Administration in each of the last three years.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information is as follows:

1985	1986	1987[1]
India	India	India
Sudan	Malaysia	Bangladesh
Bangladesh	Bangladesh	Kenya
Kenya	Zambia	Zambia
Indonesia	Kenya	Malawi
Ethiopia	Sudan	Tanzania

[1] Provisional.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will detail the annual amounts expended by the Overseas Development Administration in the Falkland Islands in each year since 1979.

Mr. Chris Patten: Following is the information:

	£ million
1979	0·915
1980	1·015
1981	1·058
1982	4·025
1983	9·053
1984	6·016
1985	10·700
1986	10·252
1987	[1]8·165

[1] Provisional.

Africa (Aid)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the recommendations of the United Nations advisory group on financial flows to Africa; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: As my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary told the House on 23 March, Her Majesty's Government welcome this report. It is a useful analysis of Africa's debt problem which we were among the first to highlight. We welcome the group's support for the debt initiative by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. We shall study the report and discuss it with our partners.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Land Registries

79. **Mr. John M. Taylor:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the present backlog at land registries.

The Attorney-General: Applications for registration have more than doubled over the past five years and rapid growth continues. To meet the increased demand, some 1,745 new posts have been authorised since June 1987, four new offices are being opened and computerisation is being extended to all offices. It is hoped thereby to make rapid inroads into the backlog and to achieve target times for all transactions within the next two years.

Director of Public Prosecutions

80. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Attorney-General when he next proposes to meet for official discussions the Director of Public Prosecutions; and what he proposes to discuss.

The Attorney-General: I expect to meet again the Director of Public Prosecutions in the near future. We shall discuss matters relating to the Crown prosecution service.

Legal Aid

81. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Attorney-General what is the latest estimate of the cost of running the legal aid service in 1987-88.

The Attorney-General: The estimate for total net expenditure on legal aid in 1987-88 is £438·463 million. The latest estimate for the administration of the service is £37·5 million.

"New Statesman" (Material)

82. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Attorney-General whether the Director of Public Prosecutions will give instructions that all the remaining items removed by the police from the office of the *New Statesman* in connection with inquiries into the alleged unauthorised disclosure of information about Project Zircon should now be returned; if he will list the main categories of material removed; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: With the exception of one item, all such material has already been returned. The material consisted of documents considered by the police to be relevant to their inquiries. The retained item is currently the subject of civil litigation.

Crown Prosecution Service

83. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a further statement on the progress of the Crown prosecution service.

The Attorney-General: I refer my hon. Friend to the answers I gave to the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) on 26 February 1988 at columns *353-54*. I am pleased to be able to refer, too, to the pay offer that the Treasury has recently made to the unions that represent the great majority of lawyers in the Crown prosecution service. This offer would secure a substantial rise in their pay with immediate effect. I am confident that this will lead to a marked improvement in our recruitment figures, and will better reward those who have worked with such commitment since the early days of the service.

"Spycatcher"

84. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will give a breakdown of the most recent available figure for the costs of all court actions in respect of the book "Spycatcher".

The Attorney-General: The total amount of costs expended to date in all court actions in respect of the book "Spycatcher" is about £522,000, plus about £90,000 for travelling and subsistence.

Shops Act 1950

85. **Mr. Stanbrook:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on his policy towards the enforcement of the Shops Act 1950 in the light of recent court decisions about the extent to which such enforcement is compatible with the treaty of Rome.

The Attorney-General: Enforcement of the Shops Act 1950 is, by virtue of section 71 of that Act, the duty of local authorities, which have the necessary powers. I have accordingly taken the view that action on my part to enforce the Act will only rarely be appropriate. Last month, however, I wrote to the Association of District Councils to request authoritative information about the scale of the enforcement effort. Whether the provisions of any part of the Act may be found to be incompatible with the United Kingdom's obligations under the treaty of Rome is not a question which affects the responsibility for enforcement of the Act.

Wright Case

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Attorney-General what is his latest estimate of the total costs that Her Majesty's Government have incurred or are liable for the Wright case and ancillary litigation involving the media; and how much of this has already been disbursed, giving particulars for each case.

The Attorney-General: The list of proceedings in connection with the book "Spycatcher", including the litigation against the media in this country and in New Zealand and Hong Kong, with the approximate amount of costs expended to date, is as follows:

Civil Proceedings for Breach of Confidentiality

	Amount £
Australia:	
Attorney-General v. Heinemann (Australia) and Wright:	494,500
New Zealand:	
Attorney-General v. Wellington Newspapers and Others:	74,000
England and Wales:	
Attorney-General v. Guardian, Observer and Sunday Times:	42,500
Hong Kong:	
Attorney-General v. South China Morning Post:	1,000
Proceedings for Criminal Contempt of Court	
Attorney-General v. Independent	15,000
Attorney-General v. Sunday Times (including for injunction to restrain threatened contempt):	750
Attorney-General v. Sunday Telegraph; News on Sunday; London Daily News; Evening News:	250

I cannot usefully estimate future costs.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Attorney-General how much was spent by *(a)* the Law Officers' Department and *(b)* the Lord Chancellor's Department on official hospitality in the financial year 1987-88.

The Attorney-General: The total amount spent by *(a)* the Law Officers' Department and *(b)* the Lord Chancellor's Department on official hospitality in the financial year 1987-88 was £2,550 and £16,305·99, respectively.

Mr. Anthony Parnes

Mr. Blair: To ask the Attorney-General if he will deposit in the Library the evidence filed with the court in Los Angeles in support of the application to extradite Mr. Anthony Parnes.

The Attorney-General: No.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Chile (Helicopters)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the United States Government about their vetoing of the sale of 10 Sea King helicopters to Chile.

Mr. Eggar: It has been the policy of successive British Governments not to comment publicly on their discussions with other Governments relating to particular defence sales.

Military Equipment Sales

Mr. Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what have been the results of the inquiry into allegations in connection with the manufacture of military cathode ray tubes by National Regunning Ltd. under licence from Thorn EMI;

(2) what have been the results of his Department's inquiry into the alleged supply through BTR Sarmcol, of the BTR Flexitank to the South African defence forces.

Mrs. Chalker: We are satisfied that no British company has acted illegally in these cases.

Buccaneer Jets

Mr. Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evidence his Department has received of United Kingdom-supplied Buccaneer jets being used for attacks on African states.

Mrs. Chalker: None.

Cyprus

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government have had any recent discussions with the Government of Turkey on the withdrawal of Turkish troops from Cyprus; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister discussed the problem of Cyprus with the Turkish Prime Minister, Mr. Ozal, in Ankara on 7 April. She reaffirmed the Government's view that good-will gestures by all the parties would make the resumption of intercommunal talks easier.

United Nations Council for Namibia

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government made any financial contribution towards the cost of the conference of the United Nations Council for Namibia in Istanbul on 21 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We did not contribute towards the cost of the conference.

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what status Her Majesty's Government attach to decisions, resolutions and decrees issued by the United Nations Council for Namibia.

Mrs. Chalker: Such pronouncements from the council are regarded as null and void.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much was spent by his Department on official hospitality in the financial year 1987-88.

Mr. Eggar: The forecast outturn for spending on official hospitality by both wings of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the financial year 1987-88 is estimated to be £5·1 million.

European Convention on Human Rights

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he intends to ratify protocol No. 4 and protocol No. 7 to the European convention on human rights; what are the considerations which will influence this decision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have no plans to ratify protocol No. 4, but we are considering whether to ratify protocol No. 7. In considering ratification, we study the consequences for our law and practice, and the acceptability of these consequences, within the context of our wish to support the work of the Council of Europe so far as possible.

PRIME MINISTER

Community Care

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister if she plans to meet Sir Roy Griffiths to discuss his report on community care; and if she will make a statement on its conclusions with particular regard to the call for a new ministerial appointment.

The Prime Minister: The Government are considering carefully all the recommendations in Sir Roy Griffiths' report on community care, including the proposal for a designated Minister responsible for this area, and we will bring forward our proposals in due course.

Offices of State

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list all offices of state to which a disqualification exists on grounds of religion; if she will state in each case the origins of that disqualification; if she will state the denominations and religions excluded from each office; and if she will state the Government's policy towards these prohibitions.

The Prime Minister: The office of Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland may not be held by a Roman Catholic. This disqualification is contained in the Catholic Relief Act 1829, section 12. There are no plans to introduce legislation on this matter.

Newspapers and Periodicals

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what newspapers and periodicals are provided out of public funds for 10 Downing street; and how many of each are purchased.

The Prime Minister: 10 Downing street obtains copies as necessary of a wide range of national, international and regional newspapers, periodicals and magazines.

Hampstead and Barnet District Health Authorities

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the proposed merger of the Hampstead and Barnet district health authorities and from whom; and what response she has made.

The Prime Minister: None. There is no such proposal.

Staff Statistics

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Prime Minister what was the average salary paid to members of her office *(a)* in 1979, *(b)* in 1983, and *(c)* in the latest year for which figures are available.

The Prime Minister: Figures are not now available for 1979 and 1983 and cannot be obtained except at disproportionate cost. The average salary paid to members of my office in 1987-88 was £18,403.

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Prime Minister how many people were employed in the Prime Minister's Office *(a)* in 1979, *(b)* in 1983, and *(c)* in the latest year for which figures are available.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 12 November 1987 at columns 169-170.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sittings (Suspensions)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council when was the last time a Minister of the Crown used the powers in Standing Order No. 10 to move that the proceedings of a sitting be suspended.

Mr. Wakeham: 14 July 1969.

ENERGY

Coal Production

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the total amount of coal produced in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland, and *(c)* England in the last year for which full figures are available; and what are the corresponding figures for each year since 1968.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Coal production by countries was as follows:

'000 tonnes

Year	*(a) Wales*	*(b) Scotland*	*(c) England*
1968	19,735	14,054	136,010
1969	17,431	13,255	124,970
1970	15,874	12,705	118,510

Year	(a) Wales	(b) Scotland	(c) England
1971	17,154	14,284	117,950
1972	13,842	12,065	95,900
1973	14,624	12,634	105,400
1974	10,932	10,556	88,957
1975	12,096	12,573	104,009
1976	11,576	12,189	100,035
1977	11,346	11,274	99,530
1978	12,227	11,360	99,990
1979	11,585	10,972	99,812
1980	11,807	11,832	106,446
1981	11,702	10,759	105,008
1982	11,829	10,143	102,739
1983	10,920	9,208	99,126
1984	3,598	3,581	44,003
1985	8,406	6,685	78,956
1986	10,611	6,925	90,556

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how much was spent by his Department on official hospitality in the financial year 1987-88.

Mr. Parkinson: An estimated £40,600.

ENVIRONMENT

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next expects to meet the chairman of Nirex to discuss matters relating to the management of nuclear waste.

Mr. Moynihan: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend gave to the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) on 17 February at column *673*.

Sporting Events (Attendances)

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates he can give of total annual attendance figures at *(a)* football, *(b)* cricket, *(c)* horse-racing and *(d)* all professional sporting events for the years 1984-85, 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88.

Mr. Moynihan: The information is as follows:

Information held by the relevant governing bodies and the Racecourse Publicity Agency gives the following estimated attendances:

(a) Football: League matches and the major Cup competitions.

	million
1984-85	21·8
1985-86	20·5
1986-87	21·4
1987-88	[1]14·7

[1] Up to January 1988.

(b) Cricket: Domestic First Class Matches, Test Matches and one Day Internationals.

	million
1984	0·95
1985	0·95
1986	0·82
1987	0·71

(c) Horseracing.

	million
1984	3·7
1985	3·7
1986	3·9
1987	4·3

(d) I am not aware of any estimates of attendances at all professional sporting events.

Water

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements the Government have made to comply with the European Community directives with regard to dangerous substances in water; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: In England and Wales, water authorities are the competent authorities for implementing European Community directives on the discharge of dangerous substances to the aquatic environment. Guidance on implementation is issued by means of departmental circular; a revised version of the current circular (DOE 18/85; Welsh Office 37/85) will be issued soon. In Scotland, the river purification boards are the competent authorities and receive similar guidance from the Scottish Development Department. The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland is responsible for implementing the directives in Northern Ireland.

The competent authorities are responsible for authorising discharges containing substances specified in the directives and for setting emission standards. Wherever possible the United Kingdom adopts the quality objective method of compliance. Discharge consents are set to ensure that the concentration of a substance in the receiving water does not exceed that specified in the appropriate directive. Both emissions and the receiving waters are monitored regularly to ensure compliance.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements have been made between Her Majesty's Government and the European Commission for United Kingdom compliance with the European Community drinking water directive.

Mr. Moynihan: The Government provide information to the European Commission in respect of the United Kingdom's compliance with the EC drinking water directive, and in response to any questions which the Commission may have.

Common Land

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government intend to introduce a new Bill for common land as recommended by the Common Land Forum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: My right hon. Friend announced on 29 January 1987 that the Government accept the case for legislation based broadly on the Forum's report and intends to introduce a comprehensive commons Bill at a suitable opportunity when parliamentary time permits.

Council House Sales

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will send a copy of the results of his

Department's survey of tenants' attitudes towards estate sales to the Nottingham city council; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Roe: The research, which has been commissioned in a number of local authorities, has been examining the factors which are important in a tenant's choice of landlord. The research is not yet complete, and no separate results from the small sample of Nottingham tenants who participated will be produced. When we have a report, we shall consider whether to publish it.

Water Privatisation

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent discussions he has had with the trade unions regarding water privatisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: On 18 April, officials from the Department met representatives of NALGO to discuss the proposed establishment of the National Rivers Authority and the privatisation of the water authorities' utility functions. The water authorities will themselves consult the trades unions on the schemes of re-organisation which they will be asked to prepare once the Public Utility Transfers and Water Charges Bill has received Royal Assent.

Right to Buy (Funds)

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what funds will be made available to charitable housing associations to allow tenants who have applied to exercise their right to buy since 1 June 1987 to carry out that right; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Roe: Tenants of charitable housing associations do not have the right to buy, but may qualify for a transferable discount under the home ownership scheme for tenants of charitable housing associations. £19 million has been allocated for the scheme in the Housing Corporation's cash-limited approved development programme for the current financial year. Applications received from 1 June 1987 are being held on a waiting list; the Department will review the position with the Housing Corporation later this year in the light of expenditure on applications in the pipeline.

Rating Reform

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to receive the Price Waterhouse report commissioned by his Department on administering the community charge; and what arrangements he is making to publish the report.

Mr. Ridley: I expect to receive the report in May. I am considering how best to disseminate its findings.

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be the cost of extending the taper on the community charge rebate from 20 per cent. to 15 per cent.; and what additional resources will be allocated for this purpose.

Mr. Howard: The cost is estimated at between £115 million and £130 million in Great Britain at 1988-89 prices, in a full year. Virtually all the cost to individual local authorities of the rebates they make is met by specific grants.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many mentally handicapped people *(a)* in receipt of severe disablement allowance and *(b)* not in receipt of severe disablement allowance will not be exempt from the proposed poll tax;

(2) how many severe disablement allowance claimants will be exempt from the proposed poll tax on the grounds that they are severely mentally handicapped.

Mr. Howard: Under the exemption proposed in schedule 1(4) to the Local Government Finance Bill, all those who are exempted from the personal community charge by reason of severe mental handicap will be in receipt of severe disablement allowance. In addition, some mentally handicapped people receiving SDA will be exempt because they are being cared for in hospitals and nursing homes. It is not possible to say how many mentally handicapped people not in receipt of SDA will not be exempt from the community charge. The Government are reconsidering the scope of the exemption for people who are severely mentally handicapped.

Pollution

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the number of illegal discharges into rivers and streams of silage effluent and other toxic wastes from farms in each water authority area during 1987; and if he will state the number of prosecutions for such offences in each area during that year.

Mr. Moynihan: Final figures are not yet available, but full details of water pollution incidents caused by farm wastes and of prosecutions by water authorities during 1987, will be published in the next few weeks jointly by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Water Authorities' Association.

Housing Association Maintenance Budgets

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what restrictions have been imposed on housing association maintenance budgets; what steps have been taken to assess the impact of such restrictions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: No restrictions are placed on housing association maintenance budgets. However, for the purposes of establishing associations' eligibility for deficit grants and their liability to surrender rental surpluses, the reasonableness of maintenance expenditure is assessed by reference to prescribed maximum levels known as maintenance allowances. These allowance levels are reviewed annually to take account of price movements, and in addition a survey of maintenance expenditure is planned this year.

Housing Corporation

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list at 1988-89 prices his Department's *(a)* gross provision and *(b)* net provision for the Housing Corporation's approved development programme (i) to provide homes for rent, under conventional funding, (ii) to provide homes for rent, under mixed funding arrangements and (iii) to provide homes for sale; and if he will give this information for each year since 1978-79, together with an estimate for 1988-89.

Mr. Waldegrave: The available information is as follows:

Housing Corporation Approved Development Programme

	Provision £ million 1988-89 prices				
	Net	Gross	Of which provision for homes:		
	(a)	(b)	[1](i) rent	[2](ii) rent	(iii) sale
1978-79	686	693	—	—	—
1979-80	719	726	—	—	—
1980-81	757	775	—	—	—
1981-82	684	726	667	—	59
1982-83	884	984	839	—	145
1983-84	775	927	758	—	169
1984-85	735	818	689	—	129
1985-86	687	775	645	—	130
1986-87	637	746	631	—	115
1987-88	666	737	605	35	97
1988-89	655	737	620	39	78

[1] Conventional funding.
[2] Mixed funding.

Note:
Prior to the introduction of the Approved Development Programme in 1981-82 the figures show total grants and loans on housing association schemes sponsored by the Housing Corporation.

Housing Investment Programme

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list at 1988-89 prices his Department's initial housing investment programme allocations *(a)* to local authorities in the north, *(b)* to local authorities in the north-west, *(c)* to local authorities in Yorkshire and Humberside, *(d)* to local authorities in the west midlands, *(e)* to local authorities in the east midlands, *(f)* to local authorities in east anglia, *(g)* to local authorities in the south-west; and if he will give this information for each year since 1978-79, together with an estimate for 1988-89.

Mrs. Roe: The figures are given in the table.

Local authorities' housing investment programme capital allocations[1]

£ millions 1988-89 prices

Region[2]	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89
North	348	270	237	162	189	138	127	103	88	77	68
North West	654	510	477	365	441	348	319	259	213	194	148
Yorkshire and Humberside	429	330	291	235	279	212	193	157	132	118	102
West Midlands	548	379	333	238	266	221	215	184	161	141	119
East Midlands	400	245	199	172	199	145	132	108	91	82	61
East Anglia	131	88	73	66	85	69	70	59	47	44	34
South West	268	191	163	144	180	131	132	112	110	87	72

[1] For 1978-79 and 1979-80 figures are the total of HIP blocks 1, 2 and 3, including energy conservation and thermal insulation allocations. From 1980-81 figures are the initial allocations comprising basic allocations and homes insulation scheme allocations. For 1982-83 only, additional retrospective allocations are included.
[2] Regions used are standard statistical regions.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list at 1988-89 prices his Department's initial housing investment programme allocations *(a)* to English local authorities, *(b)* to local authorities in Greater London, *(c)* to metropolitan authorities outside London, *(d)* to non-metropolitan authorities in the south-east, and *(e)* to English non-metropolitan authorities; and if he will give this information for each of the years 1979-80, 1981-82, 1983-84, 1985-86, and 1987-88.

Mrs. Roe: The table contains the figures for each year from 1978-79 to 1988-89. I regret that there was an error in the 1978-79 allocation figures given in the reply to the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) on 31 March at columns *709-10*.

Local authorities' housing investment programme allocations: England

£ millions: 1988-89 prices

	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89
London boroughs and GLC	1,785	1,356	1,177	768	820	667	648	542	469	405	372
Metropolitan districts	1,339	992	909	648	783	625	579	478	407	359	300
Non-metropolitan districts in South East	702	517	420	350	389	308	308	264	228	199	150
Other non-metropolitan districts	1,439	1,027	864	735	856	639	610	504	435	383	305
Total	5,266	3,892	3,370	2,501	2,848	2,238	2,145	1,788	1,539	1,347	1,127

Notes:
1979-80 figures are the totals of HIP blocks 1, 2 and 3, including energy conservation and thermal insulation allocations. From 1981-82, figures are the initial allocations comprising basic allocations and homes insulation scheme allocations.
South East is the standard region comprising the authorities in the Department of the Environment administrative Eastern (excluding East Anglia) and South Eastern regions.

Housing Capital Expenditure

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list at 1988-89 prices his Department's gross provision for local authority housing capital expenditure during each of the years from 1978-79, together with an estimate for 1988-89.

Mr. Waldegrave: Gross provision for local authorities' capital expenditure on housing for each year since 1980-81, expressed in 1988-89 prices, has been as follows:

(1988-89 Prices)

	£ million
1980-81	3,398
1981-82	3,095
1982-83	3,351
1983-84	3,119
1984-85	2,993
1985-86	2,633
1986-87	2,778
1987-88	3,051
1988-89	3,048

Public expenditure planning for the years 1978-79 and 1979-80 was on a different basis. Figures for those years cannot be provided, except at disproportionate cost.

System-built Houses

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment why Estate Action assistance was refused for 1988-89 by his Department to Walsall metropolitan borough council for repair work to the Wimpey no-fines properties in the Blakenall area of the borough.

Mrs. Roe: The Estate Action programme is directed at schemes to revitalise run-down estates, to improve management, and to increase tenant involvement. Walsall's bid for extra resources for Blakenhall did not address itself to enough of these matters to win priority in the programme.

Local Authorities (Rating and Capital Expenditure)

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his statement in the House on 9 March, *Official Report*, columns 325-7, what is the position of bona fide building contractors and developers who have negotiated genuine schemes with local authorities involving planning gain and an element of barter.

Mr. Waldegrave: Under the proposals announced on 9 March, where a local authority acquires property, or where works are carried out on property which a local authority owns and valuable consideration for the acquisition or the works is given but not in money, then prescribed expenditure will be scored as if the acquisition or works had been paid for in cash. The proposals do not affect the existing provisions under which:

(a) nil prescribed expenditure is scored when land is acquired by way of gift; and

(b) payments which are made to a local authority in accordance with an agreement under section 52 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 but which are not sums received in respect of the disposal of land or other assets are treated as capital receipts which may be used in full to justify additional capital expenditure.

National Sporting Bodies

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to refrain from seeking to influence national sporting bodies in their decisions on overseas tours and other policy matters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: Decisions on overseas tours and other policy matters are for the governing bodies of sport. In the case of South Africa, the Government remain committed to the Gleneagles agreement and to discouraging sporting links.

Gipsies

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions his Department has made use of each of its powers to effect removal of gipsies from unauthorised sites *(a)* if the local authority has a full number of designated sites and *(b)* if it does not; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Roe: My right hon. Friend has no such powers. The control of unauthorised camping is a matter for the local authority or the landowner concerned, or in certain cases where public order is threatened, for the police.

European Charter of Local Self-government

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy towards ratification of the European charter of local self-government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Government support the broad principles underlying the charter, but we do not accept that the content is appropriate for a binding international agreement. We therefore have no plans to sign or ratify the charter.

London Residuary Body

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of 20 January, *Official Report*, column 758, which of the services listed have now been transferred; and to which successor body they have gone.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 14 April 1988]:* Of the services listed in my earlier reply, the housing association loans have been transferred to the boroughs and relevant district councils, and the industrial mortgages have been transferred to the boroughs in which the mortgaged properties are located.

Water Quality

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all those waters which fall within the scope of article 1(2)*(a)* of directive 76/160/EEC and which do not meet the standards set by the directive.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 15 April 1988]:* My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Patten) announced the results of the 1986 survey of bathing water quality on 30 April 1987, *Official Report*, column 186. The results of the 1987 survey are being collated.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, by region, the number of cases concerning excesses of industrial solvents in drinking water from 1979 to the latest available date.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 15 April 1988]:* This information is not available.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the capital investment programme of each water authority in England and Wales to meet the requirements of the EEC directive on the quality of drinking and bathing water.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 15 April 1988]:* We are at present discussing these programmes with water authorities as part of the corporate planning round.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects all Britain's bathing beaches to comply fully with the EEC water quality directive.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 15 April 1988]:* The majority of bathing waters in the United Kingdom already meet the standards set out in the directive.

Water undertakings are currently spending some £70 million per year on improvement programmes designed to bring all remaining identified bathing waters up to the directive's standards. The Government will shortly be reviewing progress and timetables with the water undertakings in the light of the 1987 survey of bathing waters.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each water authority the number of derogations sought and received from 1979 to the latest available date due to excessive levels of lead in drinking water.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 15 April 1988]:* No derogations have been given for lead under article 9 of the EC drinking water directive. An application was made to the European Commission under article 20 of the directive in 1985 for a five year delay in implementation of the lead parameter in certain areas of the United Kingdom while action was taken in accordance with an agreed programme to reduce lead levels. This programme has been very successful and is now nearing completion in England. At the end of 1987, the number of water supply zones where treatment measures were being or were to be installed had been reduced to 30. These are listed by water authority area:

Water authority	*Water supply zones*
Anglian	8
Northumbrian	1
North West	16
Yorkshire	5

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will update the figures given in the *Official Report* on 24 April 1986, column *235*, regarding the anticipated costs of bringing *(a)* nitrate levels and *(b)* lead levels in drinking water to those stipulated in EEC directives.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 15 April 1988]:* The Department is currently seeking an update of the nitrate costs from water undertakers. The costs for new water treatment measures to reduce lead levels are about £500,000 for capital and about £500,000 annual running costs. The cost of replacing lead pipes in properties has not changed significantly, although the number of properties requiring such replacements will have decreased since the numbers were last estimated.

Conservation (Payments)

Mr. Wilson To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the amounts and beneficiaries of payments made to date by the Nature Conservancy Council, as a result of developments not taking place on sites of special scientific interest since the inception of the scheme.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* I refer the hon. Member to the Nature Conservancy Council's annual reports, copies of which are lodged in the House Library.

The reports contain figures on the numbers and value of management agreements concluded by the Nature Conservancy Council under section 15 of the Countryside Act 1968. Individual agreements are treated as confidential matters between owners and occupiers of sites and the Nature Conservancy Council, and it is not our policy to disclose details. The Nature Conservancy Council has no power to make management agreements under the 1968 Act over land not of SSSI quality.

EMPLOYMENT

Adult Training Scheme

Mr. Ray Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the criteria for paying supplementary grants in connection with the proposed adult training scheme.

Mr. Nicholls: Supplementary grants will be available within the new adult programme of employment training to assist in the provision of higher cost training. The criteria for paying these grants are currently being considered by the Manpower Services Commission. The Commission expects to have more detailed information available shortly.

Settle-Carlisle Railway Line

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects his Department to have completed an assessment of the study by John Jarvis and Sons plc on the tourism potential of the Settle-Carlisle railway line area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The study by J. Jarvis and Sons is a welcome contribution to the development of tourism in this very attractive part of the country and is being currently considered. The English Tourist Board and the Manpower Services Commission have both expressed interest in the study's findings.

Labour Statistics

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the latest figures for employment in *(a)* the coal industry, and *(b)* the electricity using industries.

Mr. Lee: In January 1988, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 143,000 employees in

employment in the coal extraction and solid fuels industries in Great Britain. The figure has not been adjusted for the effects of seasonal variations.

Statistics are not kept for the numbers employed in those industries which use electricity as a principal source of energy.

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the parliamentary constituencies in which the number out of work and claiming benefit declined by more than 25 per cent. between August 1984 and February 1988, including in the table for each constituency the total for *(a)* August 1986, *(b)* February 1988 and *(c)* the percentage reduction.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. The table shows the number of unemployed claimants at 9 August 1984 and 11 February 1988, together with the percentage change for each parliamentary constituency in Great Britain where the number of unemployed claimants has fallen by 25 per cent. or more. The figures are affected by seasonal factors and by changes in the coverage of the count.

Unemployed claimants

Parliamentary constituency	*9 August 1984*	*11 February 1988*	*Percentage change*
Wantage	2,391	1,231	−48·5
Henley	2,020	1,055	−47·8
Chesham and Amersham	1,742	936	−46·3
Newbury	2,650	1,451	−45·2
Tunbridge Wells	2,519	1,389	−44·9
South West Surrey	1,661	925	−44·3
Horsham	2,180	1,217	−44·2
Basingstoke	3,250	1,818	−44·1
Mole Valley	1,726	972	−43·7
Witney	2,646	1,493	−43·6
Corby	5,914	3,400	−42·5
Gillingham	5,479	3,251	−40·7
Brentwood and Ongar	2,438	1,451	−40·5
Welwyn Hatfield	3,123	1,866	−40·2
Guildford	2,097	1,257	−40·1
Oxford West and Abingdon	3,152	1,892	−40·0
West Hertfordshire	3,594	2,159	−39·9
Maidstone	3,525	2,121	−39·8
North West Surrey	2,356	1,424	−39·6
Reigate	2,023	1,226	−39·4
South West Hertfordshire	2,530	1,536	−39·3
North West Hampshire	2,361	1,441	−39·0
Mid Sussex	1,991	1,218	−38·8
Esher	1,563	964	−38·3
Aylesbury	2,741	1,694	−38·2
Saffron Walden	2,392	1,474	−38·1
East Surrey	1,625	1,013	−37·7
Medway	5,264	3,294	−37·4
Sevenoaks	2,416	1,514	−37·3
North Hertfordshire	3,573	2,252	−37·0
Mid Kent	4,837	3,056	−36·8
Ruislip—Northwood	1,779	1,124	−36·8
Windsor and Maidenhead	2,612	1,655	−36·6
Spelthorne	2,328	1,479	−36·5
Woking	2,387	1,519	−36·4
Reading West	3,334	2,130	−36·1
Reading East	3,923	2,518	−35·8
Wycombe	2,932	1,902	−35·1
Congleton	3,322	2,156	−35·1
Harlow	4,426	2,875	−35·0
Croydon South	2,023	1,316	−34·9
Wokingham	1,970	1,282	−34·9
Beaconsfield	1,700	1,107	−34·9
South East Cambridgeshire	1,892	1,240	−34·5
Wealden	1,907	1,256	−34·1
Crawley	2,485	1,637	−34·1
Rochford	2,828	1,867	−34·0
Hertford and Stortford	2,093	1,382	−34·0
East Berkshire	3,196	2,116	−33·8
Braintree	3,283	2,177	−33·7
Aldershot	2,971	1,974	−33·6
Surbiton	1,554	1,034	−33·5
Banbury	3,263	2,180	−33·2
Billericay	3,882	2,599	−33·0
Harborough	2,566	1,721	−32·9
Croydon central	3,609	2,435	−32·5
Basildon	6,712	4,530	−32·5
Chertsey and Walton	2,099	1,418	−32·4
Wimbledon	2,894	1,959	−32·3
South west Bedfordshire	3,766	2,550	−32·3
Buckingham	2,561	1,742	−32·0
Stevenage	4,059	2,764	−31·9
Dagenham	4,311	2,937	−31·9
Kettering	3,308	2,255	−31·8
Tonbridge and Malling	2,678	1,827	−31·8
Cheadle	2,921	1,996	−31·7
South Colchester and Maldon	4,240	2,901	−31·6
Hornchurch	3,047	2,087	−31·5
Southend west	3,590	2,460	−31·5
Cambridge	3,554	2,437	−31·4
St. Albans	2,462	1,690	−31·4
Milton Keynes	6,750	4,637	−31·3
Loughborough	3,709	2,549	−31·3
Wellingborough	4,111	2,835	−31·0
Carshalton and Wallington	2,899	2,001	−31·0
Rutland and Melton	3,473	2,401	−30·9
Salisbury	3,208	2,228	−30·5
Castle point	3,430	2,383	−30·5
Oxford east	4,025	2,803	−30·4
Cirencester and Tewkesbury	2,976	2,074	−30·3
Richmond-upon-Thames and Barnes	2,675	1,868	−30·2
Slough	4,629	3,238	−30·0
Pendle	4,597	3,222	−29·9
Alyn and Deeside	4,694	3,296	−29·8
Upminster	3,029	2,136	−29·5
North Dorset	2,181	1,539	−29·4
Twickenham	2,307	1,628	−29·4
Kingston-upon-Thames	2,408	1,702	−29·3
West Gloucestershire	4,609	3,259	−29·3
South West Cambridgeshire	2,500	1,771	−29·2
Rugby and Kenilworth	4,512	3,202	−29·0
Northampton north	4,789	3,401	−29·0
Worcester	5,030	3,574	−28·9
The City of London and Westminster South	5,423	3,856	−28·9
Blaby	2,915	2,074	−28·9
East Hampshire	2,419	1,722	−28·8
Mid Worcestershire	6,016	4,285	−28·8
Davyhulme	4,937	3,520	−28·7
South Ribble	4,626	3,303	−28·6
Stratford-on-Avon	3,314	2,376	−28·3
Dudley West	6,716	4,822	−28·2
Southend east	4,675	3,358	−28·2
Huntingdon	3,511	2,522	−28·2
Uxbridge	2,625	1,886	−28·2
North Bedfordshire	4,573	3,286	−28·1
Bosworth	3,557	2,557	−28·1
Leicester east	5,919	4,259	−28·0
Macclesfield	3,400	2,450	−27·9
Dartford	3,454	2,494	−27·8
Shipley	3,592	2,596	−27·7
Chelmsford	3,035	2,196	−27·6
Stroud	3,743	2,713	−27·5
Warley east	7,171	5,201	−27·5
Eddisbury	5,028	3,649	−27·4
Barking	4,042	2,937	−27·3
Hazel grove	3,630	2,642	−27·2
Winchester	2,057	1,498	−27·2

Parliamentary constituency	9 August 1984	11 February 1988	Percentage change
South Suffolk	3,281	2,391	−27·1
Rossendale and Darwen	4,728	3,448	−27·1
Coventry south west	5,006	3,652	−27·0
Leicester south	7,612	5,557	−27·0
Thurrock	5,822	4,252	−27·0
Epsom and Ewell	1,901	1,392	−26·8
North Colchester	4,129	3,027	−26·7
Bristol west	7,347	5,394	−26·6
Ribble Valley	2,164	1,589	−26·6
Sutton and Cheam	2,029	1,492	−26·5
Hyndburn	4,170	3,067	−26·5
Bath	3,817	2,809	−26·4
Aberavon	4,762	3,508	−26·3
Burnley	5,949	4,389	−26·2
Watford	3,235	2,388	−26·2
Staffordshire moorlands	3,608	2,664	−26·2
Cheltenham	4,381	3,235	−26·2
Epping forest	2,816	2,080	−26·1
Altrincham and Sale	3,354	2,478	−26·1
Leeds north west	4,426	3,271	−26·1
Leicester west	7,299	5,397	−26·1
Bury south	4,622	3,421	−26·0
Hertsmere	2,595	1,922	−25·9
Ravensbourne	2,017	1,495	−25·9
Romford	2,776	2,059	−25·8
Gravesham	4,984	3,701	−25·7
Brentford and Isleworth	4,165	3,093	−25·7
Stockport	4,845	3,598	−25·7
North Wiltshire	3,518	2,614	−25·7
Northampton south	4,032	3,000	−25·6
Ashford	3,396	2,528	−25·6
Wyre forest	5,135	3,823	−25·6
Wanstead and Woodford	2,199	1,645	−25·2
Wrexham	5,000	3,742	−25·2
Nuneaton	5,462	4,089	−25·1
Central Suffolk	3,097	2,319	−25·1
Stoke-on-Trent central	5,909	4,432	−25·0
Daventry	2,713	2,035	−25·0
Pudsey	3,202	2,402	−25·0
Bishop Auckland	7,166	5,378	−25·0

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in *(a)* Burnley and *(b)* Pendle have been unemployed for over one year; and what percentage of the work force this represents.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. On 14 January 1988, the numbers of unemployed claimants who had been unemployed for one year or more in the Burnley and Pendle travel-to-work areas were 1,790 and 1,162 respectively. These totals represent 4·6 per cent. and 3·9 per cent. respectively of the number of employees in employment plus the unemployed in each travel-to-work area.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total number of people unemployed in (i) Burnley and (ii) Pendle who are *(a)* 18 to 21 years of age, *(b)* 22 to 25 years of age, *(c)* 26 to 30 years of age, and *(d)* 31 to 35 years of age; and what percentage of each respective age group this represents.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. The following table shows the number of unemployed claimants in the Burnley and Pendle travel-to-work areas on 14 January 1988, for the available age groups which most closely correspond with those requested. Unemployment rates by age are not calculated below national level.

14 January 1988

	Unemployed claimants
Burnley travel-to-work area	
aged 18-19 years	368
20-24 years	870
25-29 years	662
30-34 years	488
Pendle travel-to-work area	
aged 18-19 years	278
20-24 years	682
25-29 years	464
30-34 years	349

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of people registered unemployed in the Tottenham constituency on the latest available date; what proportion of the working population this represents; and what are the corresponding figures for each month since June 1979.

Mr. Lee: My Department does not calculate unemployment rates for areas smaller than travel-to-work areas. Unemployment statistics for parliamentary constituencies are available only from June 1983, and are available from the Library.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what was the change in the number of employees in employment in each of the English regions, in England, and in Great Britain, excluding Northern Ireland, between 1979 and 1986;

(2) what was the change in the number of people employed in *(a)* manufacturing and *(b)* the service industries in each of the English standard regions, and in England as a whole between 1979 and 1986;

(3) what was the percentage change in the number of people employed in *(a)* manufacturing and *(b)* the service industries in each of the standard English regions, and in England as a whole between 1979 and 1986;

(4) what was the change in the number of people employed in *(a)* manufacturing and *(b)* the service industries in Great Britain, excluding Northern Ireland between 1979 and 1986; and in each case what was the percentage change.

Mr. John Lee: The figures are as follows:

Employees in Employment changes in the levels of employment between June 1979 and June 1986

Thousands

	All Employees	Manufacturing Industries		Service Industries	
		Numbers	Percentages	Numbers	Percentages
South East	−124	−465	−24·9	441	8·7
East Anglia	60	−6	−2·9	81	20·1
South West	−32	−70	−15·9	68	6·8
West Midlands	−224	−289	−29·3	91	8·5

	All Employees	Manufacturing Industries Numbers	Manufacturing Industries Percentages	Service Industries Numbers	Service Industries Percentages
East Midlands	−37	−112	−18·5	107	14·2
Yorks and Humberside	−225	−246	−34·7	85	8·1
North West	−414	−345	−35·5	−24	−1·6
North	−170	−142	−34·5	24	3·6
England	−1,166	−1,675	−27·0	873	7·6
Great Britain (excl. Northern Ireland)	−1,550	−1,982	−27·9	895	6·8

The figures have not been adjusted for the effects of seasonal variations.

Some of the decrease in the manufacturing figures will be the result of the re-classification of jobs such as industrial cleaning, computer services and road haulage, previously done by manufacturers' own employees and now done by sub-contractors. This developing feature of our economy has the effect of exaggerating the extent of the move from manufacturing to service sector employment.

"Training for Employment"

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the information in figure 5 of the paper entitled "Training for Employment" for each region of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is only available at disproportionate cost.

Job Search Boundaries

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which offices were chosen for the additional questions on job search boundaries which have been piloted in restart interviews from 1 February; and how many interviews have been conducted in each chosen office.

Mr. Lee: The 11 offices in which the form was launched and the number of interviews conducted at each location from 1 February 1988 to 25 March 1988 are as follows:

	Number
Billingham	1,600
Dundee	1,422
Ealing	1,558
Huddersfield	1,192
Leicester	3,115
Plymouth	2,043
Port Talbot	1,240
Preston	1,396
Stoke	2,454
Watford	828
Wimbledon	1,276

Industrial Premises (Inspections)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish in the *Official Report* *(a)* the number of registered premises under the factory inspectorate and the number of factory visits by factory inspectors and *(b)* how frequently, on average, industrial premises can expect a routine visit from a factory inspector, for each year from 1974 to 1987, inclusive.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive does not hold information on the number of premises registered with the factory inspectorate for the years 1974 to 77.

The number of registered fixed premises for the years 1978 to 1987 is as follows:

Date	Number of premises
1 January 1978	280,716
1 January 1979	300,718
1 January 1980	309,915
1 January 1981	309,100
[1] 1 January 1982	576,456
1 January 1983	468,609
1 January 1984	393,237
31 March 1985	395,860
31 March 1986	399,885
31 March 1987	401,815

[1] The figure for 1982 is the first of those produced from a computerised database which was based on the Department of Employment census. The database was initially inflated by premises for which the Health and Safety Executive was not the enforcing authority.

Factory inspectors made 153,835 visits to factories in 1974. Information for the years 1975 to 1987 is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The factory inspectorate's programme of preventive visits is planned on the basis of a rating system. There is no fixed period between inspections, workplaces with poor standards, poor management or high risk potential being inspected more frequently. Information is not available on how frequently, on average, industrial premises can expect a routine visit from a factory inspector.

Health and Safety

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the total funding for the Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive for each year from 1974 to 1987, inclusive.

Mr. Nicholls: The total provision available to the Health and Safety Commission and Executive for each year since 1974 is:

Year	£ (million)
1974-75	13·6
1975-76	28·6
1976-77	39·3
1977-78	45·4
1978-79	48·6
1979-80	58·1
1980-81	73·7
1981-82	84·7
1982-83	86·0
1983-84	93·1
1984-85	95·4
1985-86	98·8
1986-87	100·0
1987-88	102·3

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish in the *Official Report*

(a) the number of deaths, *(b)* the number of serious and major injuries and *(c)* the number of employees in the construction industry for 1970 to 1987 inclusive for (i) public, (ii) private and (iii) public and private construction.

Mr. Nicholls: The available information is given in the table below.

Year	*Numbers of reported occupational injuries to employees in Great Britain resulting in:*		*Numbers of employees (construction industry) (1000's)*
	Death	*Major injury*	
1970	204	..	..
1971	201	..	1,159·0
1972	190	..	1,193·0
1973	231	..	1,269·0
1974	166	..	1,223·0
1975	182	..	1,207·0
1976	156	..	1,203·0
1977	130	..	1,167·0
1978	121	..	1,161·0
1979	119	..	1,201·0
1980	128	..	1,192·0
1981	105	1,690	1,086·0
1982	100	1,950	1,034·7
1983	118	2,178	1,021·4
1984	100	2,288	1,015·8
1985	104	2,239	991·8
1986-87[1]	90	2,538	975·3

.. not available.
[1] provisional.

Note:
The construction industry is as defined by Standard Industrial Classification 1980 (SIC80) Division 5. This definition has been applied retrospectively for the years 1970-1979.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was *(a)* the estimated number of building sites and *(b)* the number of construction Health and Safety Executive inspectors for the years 1970 to 1987, inclusive.

Mr. Nicholls: The HSE does not keep estimates of the numbers of building sites. All inspectors in the factory inspectorate sector of the HSE may work in construction groups. The number of experienced Inspectors employed on construction work for the years 1979-87 at 1 January is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1979	86
1980	87
1981	90
1982	89
1983	88
1984	88
1985	86
1986	84·5
[1]1987	75

[1] September

No information is available centrally for the years 1970-1978. In addition to the 75 experienced inspectors, there were another 17 qualified inspectors working in construction on 1 September 1987. It is planned to recruit enough factory inspectors to bring the total number of experienced inspectors in construction groups nationally to around 100 by 1990.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how frequently the average building site has been inspected for each year from 1970 to 1987.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the final outcome, in terms of *(a)* construction sites visited, *(b)* prohibition and improvement notices issued and *(c)* prosecutions initiated for the construction site blitzes carried out by the Health and Safety Executive in 1987.

Mr. Nicholls: During the construction site blitzes carried out by the Health and Safety Executive in 1987, 4,289 construction sites were visited, 1,006 prohibition and 28 improvement notices were issued, and 25 prosecutions were initiated.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which areas of the country, or London boroughs, will be blitzed by construction inspectors during the current year; and when.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive plans to carry out the following construction blitzes in 1988:

April
"Black Country"
Lincoln
Torbay
West Wales
Worcester
London—(North London)

May
Bradford
Hertfordshire
North Wales

June
Plymouth
Folkestone

September
Buckinghamshire
Bolton

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much was spent by his Department on official hospitality in the financial year 1987-88.

Mr. Nicholls: The provisional figure for 1987-88 is £29,000.

Ethnic Monitoring

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how he defined the term "significant employers" in the context of the review of ethnic monitoring practice in the private sector;

(2) what firms or employees were included in the review of ethnic monitoring practice; and on what basis they were selected.

Mr. Nicholls: No review of ethnic monitoring practice has taken place. The figures provided by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in reply to the hon. Member on 30 March 1988, *Official Report*, columns 526-7, represent information gathered from the normal operational activities of this Department's race relations employment advisory service. No precise definition of "significant" is applied by the service but the major private sector employers visited are those regarded as likely to benefit from specialised advice which can assist the

employer to formulate or develop policies and practices which ensure equal opportunity. RREAS provides a confidential service and details of individual organisations visited cannot be given without seeking the consent of those organisations. Resource considerations make this impracticable.

WALES

General Council of British Shipping

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the closure of the Cardiff office of the General Council of British Shipping; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: None since 1986.

Rating Reform

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has yet reached a decision concerning the community charge in relation to the residents of Caldey Island, Pembrokeshire.

Mr. Peter Walker: I refer my hon. Friend to the letter I wrote to him on 15 April, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Nurses

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many nurses are currently employed by health authorities in Wales; and how many are undertaking further training to improve the scope and standard of their skills.

Mr. Grist: The whole-time equivalent of nursing and midwifery staff (excluding auxiliaries) employed by health authorities in Wales is given in the following table. Information on the number undertaking post-basic training courses is not immediately available but I will write to the hon. Gentleman about this as soon as possible and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

District Health Authority	*Whole-time equivalent as at 30 September 1987*
Clwyd	2,817
East Dyfed	1,598
Gwent	3,132
Gwynedd	1,547
Mid Glamorgan	4,025
Pembrokeshire	515
Powys	723
South Glamorgan	3,422
West Glamorgan	2,871

Welsh Language

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what occasions he has met his Department's working party on the Welsh language.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Working Group has met under my chairmanship on 3 occasions since January. My right hon. Friend is fully informed of its deliberations.

Elderly People

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to *(a)* ensure that health authorities and social service departments were made aware of the fact that, from 11 April, elderly people will no longer have access to private nursing homes until their own homes have been sold and *(b)* increase funds for community care provision to cater for the increased number of elderly people who need nursing care and have to remain at home.

Mr. Grist: I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services earlier today.

Coal Industry

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are at present employed in *(a)* the north Wales coalfield and *(b)* the south Wales coalfield; and what are the corresponding figures for 1978, 1968 and 1958.

Mr. Peter Walker: Available data are National Coal Board/British Coal estimates of the numbers on colliery books.

	North Wales (Thousands)	*South Wales[1] (Thousands)*
1958	[2] 9·1	[3] 99·6
1968	[2] 3·6	[3] 50·6
1978	[4] 1·2	[4] 29·0
1987	[4] 1·0	[4] 10·2

[1] Includes Forest of Dean (1958), Somerset (1958 and 1968).
[2] Calendar year average, includes Ifton colliery, Shropshire.
[3] Time of year unknown.
[4] At 31 March.

Steel Production

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total crude steel production in Wales in the last year for which full figures are available; and what are the corresponding figures for each year since 1968.

Mr. Peter Walker: Crude steel production figures for Wales from 1968 to 1987 are given in the following table:

Total production of crude steel

	'000 tonnes
1968	8,383
1969	7,703
1970	8,448
1971	7,910
1972	8,573
1973	8,451
1974	6,705
1975	5,471
1976	6,348
1977	6,000
1978	6,039
1979	6,936
1980	2,951
1981	4,386
1982	4,137
1983	4,854
1984	5,020
1985	4,731
1986	4,849
1987	5,431

Source: Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau.

Fishing Industry

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of the United Kingdom fishing fleet the Welsh fleet represents; and what are the corresponding figures for each year since 1968.

Mr. Peter Walker: In 1986, fishing vessels over 40 ft in length operating from Wales amounted to 2·7 per cent. of the United Kingdom total. During the period 1968 to 1985 the figure varied between 1·9 per cent. and 3 per cent. of the United Kingdom total. Comprehensive data on vessels under 40 ft are not readily available.

Self-sufficiency

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the level of self-sufficiency of Wales in each of the following products: *(a)* fish, *(b)* mutton and lamb, *(c)* poultrymeat, *(d)* beef, *(e)* oats, *(f)* cheese, *(g)* liquid milk, *(h)* barley, *(i)* potatoes, *(j)* pigmeat, *(k)* eggs, *(l)* wheat and *(m)* butter.

Mr. Peter Walker: Estimates of the ratio of production to consumption in 1987 for each of the food products are given in the following table:

		Self sufficiency (production/consumption)
(a)	Fish	not available
(b)	Mutton and Lamb	3·5
(c)	Poultry (chicken only)	3·1
(d)	Beef	3·9
(e)	Oats	not available
(f)	Cheese	1·9
(g)	Liquid milk	3·2
(h)	Barley	not available
(i)	Potatoes	0·7
(j)	Pigmeat	0·4
(k)	Eggs	0·7
(l)	Wheat	not available
(m)	Butter	2·1

Estimates of production are based on figures from the Aggregate Net Income calculation and the Milk Marketing Board. Estimates of consumption are taken from the results of the national food survey, based on a small sample of 120 households in Wales and are therefore subject to some estimation error.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the level of self-sufficiency of Wales in terms of electricity produced and consumed; and what are the corresponding figures for each year since 1968.

Mr. Peter Walker: Available data for production and consumption of electricity are shown in the following table:

	Total available and supplied to distribution system	*All sales to customers*[1]
1968	14,306	11,380
1969	13,246	11,885
1970	13,244	12,601
1971	13,219	12,554
1972	17,320	12,197
1973	19,501	12,754
1974	23,176	12,415
1975	18,604	11,859
1976	21,618	12,592
1977	22,950	12,920
1978	23,735	13,229
1979	25,481	14,286
1980	20,606	12,707
1981	23,974	12,742
1982	21,885	12,844
1983	21,063	13,074
1984	22,338	12,988
1985	22,931	13,972
1986	20,944	14,748

[1] Excludes direct sales by the CEGB, which cannot be allocated between Wales and England without disclosure of figures relating to individual establishments.
Source: Department of Energy and "Digest of Welsh Statistics".

Exports and Imports

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total tonnage of *(a)* overseas export trade and *(b)* overseas imports trade through Welsh ports during the last year for which full figures are available; and what are the corresponding figures for each year since 1968.

Mr. Peter Walker: The information requested is given in the following table:

Foreign traffic through Welsh seaports: all overseas trading areas

million net tonnes[1]

	Imports	*Exports*
1968	29	7
1969	34	9
1970	36	10
1971	39	10
1972	39	11
1973	43	11
1974	46	11
1975	35	9
1976	37	9
1977	30	8
1978	31	9
1979	31	9
1980	24	10
1981	21	[2]12
1982	20	8
1983	15	8
1984	21	8
1985	23	9
[3]1986	24	9

Source: HM Customs and Excise.
[1] Excluding crates and other packaging.
[2] Partly based on sample data.
[3] Provisional.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent by his Department on official hospitality in the financial year 1987-88.

Mr. Peter Walker: In 1987-88, my Department spent £22,365·99 on official hospitality.

Labour Statistics

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what was the change in the number of people employed in *(a)* manufacturing and *(b)* the service industries in Wales between 1979 and 1986;

(2) what was the percentage change in the number of people employed in *(a)* manufacturing and *(b)* the service industries in Wales between 1979 and 1986.

Mr. Peter Walker: Available data show the following:

Employees in employment

	Change	*Per cent. change*
Manufacturing	−112,000	−35·5
Services	−16,000	−2·8

Source: Department of Employment Quarterly Series.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the change in the number of employees in employment in Wales between 1979 and 1986.

Mr. Peter Walker: The numbers of employees in employment in Wales at June 1979 and June 1986 were 1,033,000 and 861,000 respectively. This represents a change of 172,000.

Economic Regeneration

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the amount spent by each district authority in Wales during the last year for which full figures are available on economic regeneration; and what are the corresponding figures for each year since 1979.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer 15 April 1988]:* It is not possible separately to identify expenditure on economic regeneration, at which a number of different activities of local authorities are wholly or partly aimed.

SCOTLAND

Education Expenditure

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the per capita spending on primary and secondary education in each school board area.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The table, which has been compiled from local authority financial returns, gives information on current expenditure per pupil in primary and secondary schools in each education authority in 1986-87, the latest year for which information is available.

£s at out-turn prices

Region	*Primary*	*Secondary*
Borders	1,091	1,601
Central	961	1,651
Dumfries and Galloway	946	1,713
Fife	1,021	1,706
Grampian	1,021	1,725
Highland	1,033	1,622
Lothian	1,033	1,846
Strathclyde	1,066	1,787
Tayside	988	1,768
Orkney	1,249	2,007
Shetland	1,391	2,503
Western Isles	1,094	2,138

Information about individual schools is not held centrally. The School Boards (Scotland) Bill now before Parliament will establish a separate board for each education authority school; each board will have the right to receive information on expenditure related to the school.

Roads (Improvement)

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a programme for trunk road improvements in Scotland to update the report, "Policy for Scottish Roads," last published in 1984.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A further policy document will be issued, but it will need to take account of several forthcoming reports, particularly that on routes south of Edinburgh and the feasibility studies on the upgrading of the A74 to motorway. I hope that publication of the policy document will be possible in the spring of next year.

Rating Reform

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many extra posts will be created in the Scottish courts administration in 1988, 1989, 1990 as a result of the community charge legislation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The explanatory and financial memorandum to the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Bill estimated that up to 40 additional staff will be required. This estimate remains unchanged and additional staff will be deployed to the courts as and when required.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what figures were available to him, when he considered alternative introduction dates for the community charge, concerning the likely average individual charge in 1988-89.

Mr. Lang: Calculations of illustrative personal community charge levels have been made only on the basis of the charges which would have been required to replace actual domestic rate income. No future projections of personal community charge levels — which would be entirely speculative — have been made. My right hon. and learned Friend has always been concerned to secure the benefits of the community charge system for Scotland as soon as possible.

Oil Landings (Shetlands)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been paid to the Shetlands council as an automatic percentage of oil landed for every year for which figures are available.

Mr. Lang: That is a matter for the Shetland Islands council. I have no locus.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent by his Department on official hospitality in the financial year 1987-88.

Mr. Rifkind: The amount spent was £41,983.

A96 (Roundabout)

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has decided what kind of inquiry there will be as a result of objections to proposals to establish a roundabout at Selattic quarry on the A96 at Inverurie road; when such an inquiry is due to commence; what

notice will be given to objectors; and if objectors who have or who have not yet lodged objections will be allowed to propose alternative schemes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am not yet in a position to say whether or when a public inquiry into the proposed line of the Bucksburn diversion will be necessary. This will depend on whether the objections received to the published draft road order can be resolved by negotiation and also on public reaction to the draft compulsory purchase order to be published in the summer.

If an inquiry is held, objectors will receive no less than 28 days notice in writing of the date, time and place. Objectors would have the opportunity to propose alternative schemes at an inquiry.

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many objections have been lodged against proposals to establish a roundabout at Selattic quarry on the A96 at Inverurie road.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Twenty.

MV Hebridean Isles

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has as to what sum of compensation was paid by Cochranes Ltd., of Selby to Caledonian MacBrayne for errors in the design and construction of the MV Hebridean Isles; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No compensation payments were made by Cochranes Ltd., to Caledonian MacBrayne.

Scottish Development Agency

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the names of the chairman and directors of the Scottish Development Agency, their periods of office and their annual remuneration.

Mr. Lang: The information on the chairman and board members is as follows:

Name and Position with Period of Office

	Remuneration £
Sir Robin G. Duthie CBE—Chairman 1 January 1988 to 31 December 1988	30,508
Douglas F. Hardie CBE—Deputy Chairman 1 January 1987 to 31 December 1988	16,760
Iain Robertson—Chief Executive 1 September 1987 to 31 August 1992	49,025
James S. Gordon CBE—Member 1 January 1987 to 31 December 1989	3,776
Robert Cowan—Member 1 January 1988 to 31 July 1992	
Ian C. Wood CBE—Member 1 January 1987 to 31 December 1989	3,776
Sir Peter Main—Member 1 January 1986 to 21 December 1988	3,776
James F. G. Anderson CBE—Member 1 March 1986 to 31 December 1988	3,776
George F. Robertson FRICS—Member 1 January 1987 to 31 December 1990	3,776
Gavin H. Laird—Member 1 January 1987 to 31 December 1990	3,776
Dr. Graham Hills FRSC, FRSE—Member 1 January 1988 to 31 December 1991	3,776
Sir Alex Fletcher—Member 1 January 1988 to 31 December 1991	3,776
Sir David Nickson CBE—Member 1 July 1988 to 31 December 1988 (Chairman) 1 January 1989 to 31 December 1993)	3,776

Mr. Robert Cowan is chairman of the Highlands and Islands Development Board (HIDB) as well as a member of the Scottish Development Agency board. His salary is paid by the HIDB.

Labour Statistics

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what was the change in the numbers of employees in employment in Scotland between 1979 and 1986;

(2) what was the change in the number of people employed in *(a)* manufacturing and *(b)* the service industries in Scotland between 1979 and 1986;

(3) what was the percentage change in the number of people employed in *(a)* manufacturing and *(b)* the service industries in Scotland between 1979 and 1986.

Mr. Lang: The table gives the available information. The figures are subject to revision when further information becomes available.

Estimated change between June 1979 and June 1986

Employees in employment	*Number*	*Per cent.*
All industries	−214,000	−10
Manufacturing (SIC 2 to 4)	−194,000	−32
Service industries (SIC 6 to 9)	+36,000	+3

Education (Ministerial Correspondence)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of Tuesday, 12 April, *Official Report*, column 44, what resources are being devoted by his Department to the investigation into the unauthorised disclosure of recent correspondence between his office and that of the Prime Minister concerning opting out of the education system in Scotland.

Mr. Rifkind: I have nothing to add to my reply of 12 April to the hon. Member at column 44.

Nursery Education

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish statistics showing nursery education provision in each of Scotland's regions.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is set out in the table.

Pupils aged 2 to 5 years in education authority nursery schools and departments (provisional figures for September 1987)

	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Full-time and part-time*
Borders	—	397	397
Central	12	2,493	2,505
Dumfries and Galloway	3	432	435
Fife	201	4,078	4,279
Grampian	261	2,440	2,701
Highland	5	619	624
Lothian	779	7,238	8,017

	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Full-time and part-time*
Strathclyde	1,123	16,607	17,730
Tayside	487	1,915	2,402
Orkney	—	85	85
Shetland	—	110	110
Western Isles	—	—	—
Scotland	2,871	36,414	39,285

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of Scotland's three and four-year-olds receive nursery education; how many are full-time; and how many are part-time in their attendance.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on 25 February at columns *277-78*.

Fines

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to come to a decision on whether to introduce a unitary or day fines system in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This is one of several proposals which we shall consider when we have the results of the current study of the effectiveness of the 15 fines officers appointed to work in the sheriff courts, which we expect to receive in the near future.

Anthony Cavendish

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the latest costs in Scotland in the proceedings relating to Anthony Cavendish.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Proceedings in Scotland in relation to Anthony Cavendish's book "Inside Intelligence" have been brought by the Lord Advocate on behalf of the Government. The costs which have been incurred to date in relation to those proceedings arise from court dues and printing costs and amount to £931·06. These costs do not include any element in respect of the expenses incurred by parties to the proceedings in the nature of fees and other expenses, and liability for their payment will only be known once the proceedings are concluded and when accounts have been lodged and taxed by the relevant authorities.

Bus Services

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he has given to the problem of bus services being withdrawn while the route is subject to a process of competitive tendering; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Regional and islands councils in Scotland have the power to subsidise any service which they consider to be socially necessary and which is not being provided on a commercial basis. If it appears that the time scale of the normal tendering process might lead to a gap in the provision of a service, the local authorities have the power under section 91(2) of the Transport Act 1985 to enter into temporary emergency agreements to maintain or replace services or to secure a new service.

Pay Beds

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of private patients using pay beds in the Tayside health board area on the latest available date; and what are the corresponding figures for each year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 24 March 1988]:* The information requested is given in the table:

Year	*Number of private patients*
1979	56
1980	43
1981	30
1982	15
1983	83
1984	123
1985	137
1986	115

NATIONAL FINANCE

Developing Countries (Debt)

Miss Lestor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all the developing countries which have outstanding official debts, including export credits, to the United Kingdom and give figures for (i) their outstanding official debts in 1978 and in the latest year for which figures are available and (ii) the total amount of debt relief and cancellation of their debts between 1987 and the latest year.

Mr. Peter Lilley *[holding answer 14 March 1988]:* It is not the practice of this or previous Governments to reveal the exposure of the Export Credits Guarantee Department to individual countries. Figures for amounts at risk and debt restructuring by area are published in ECGD's "Summary of Audited Trading Results 1986-87." Information relating to other official debts is listed as follows:

Official debts outstanding to United Kingdom[1] in 1978 and 1986
(£ millions)

Country	*Amount of Principal Outstanding at end 1978*	*at end 1986*	*Debt relief[2] 1978-1986*
Antigua and Barbuda	0·495	0·457	—
Barbados	3·225	6·517	—
Belize	1·971	13·429	—
Bolivia	0·404	0·271	—
Botswana	18·542	22·596	20·682
Brazil	5·665	3·675	0·961
British Virgin Islands	2·460	2·488	—
Cameroon	1·610	26·796	—
Cayman Islands	0·986	3·224	—
Colombia	3·928	3·124	—
Costa Rica	6·726	27·392	0·929
Cote d'Ivoire	2·839	21·959	0·280
Cyprus	1·079	0·989	—
Dominica	1·943	5·989	—
Ecuador	8·494	7·562	—
Falklands Islands	0·281	0·167	—
Fiji	13·304	29·915	—
Gambia, The	5·173	0·581	5·219
Ghana	21·739	3·717	50·877
Gibraltar	2·336	1·327	—
Grenada	1·310	2·379	—
Guyana	24·003	27·550	—
Honduras	—	16·531	—

Country	Amount of Principal Outstanding at end 1978	Amount of Principal Outstanding at end 1986	Debt relief[2] 1978-1986
India	519·116	264·171	[3]—
Indonesia	39·064	31·506	39·853
Jamaica	31·330	73·268	8·894
Jordan	30·323	39·233	—
Kenya	32·999	29·936	0·750
Lao, Peoples Democratic Republic	—	0·035	—
Lesotho	0·866	1·597	0·404
Liberia	0·086	5·925	—
Malawi	53·217	32·656	30·884
Malaysia	38·336	38·336	2·020
Malta	2·658	8·859	—
Mauritius	10·569	12·472	—
Montserrat	0·087	0·003	—
Nicaragua	0·615	0·585	—
Nigeria	34·377	12·002	
Papua New Guinea	0·350	17·626	—
Paraguay	5·062	4·220	—
Peru	5·062	4·194	—
Philippines	—	14·939	—
St. Kitts and Nevis	1·782	0·947	—
St. Lucia	5·328	5·262	—
St. Vincent	1·371	0·919	—
Senegal	—	1·000	—
Seychelles	2·085	11·687	—
Sierra Leone	9·000	1·236	10·409
Singapore	26·443	11·188	—
Solomon Islands	4·220	13·182	—
Sri Lanka	25·531	8·866	25·210
Sudan	8·860	0·665	9·914
Swaziland	19·708	32·187	—
Tanzania	6·263	20·063	6·198
Thailand	3·799	42·596	—
Tonga	1·198	1·988	—
Trinidad and Tobago	0·690	2·436	—
Tunisia	0·742	0·431	—
Turkey	39·348	84·235	18·842
Uganda	19·136	3·316	22·090
Vanuatu	0·265	0·814	—
Vietnam	1·981	1·970	—
Yemen, Peoples Democratic Republic	3·749	4·163	—
Zambia	49·894	97·256	7·313
Zimbabwe	6·436	49·581	[4]55·821

[1] Relates to amounts outstanding to Overseas Development Administration and Commonwealth Development Corporation.

[2] Includes amounts for cancellation of aid loans and amounts for rescheduled aid loans by ODA. (Principal and interest).

[3] In place of normal debt forgiveness £564 million is being given in the form of local costs grants.

[4] Relate to debts of former Rhodesian Government (mostly excluded from 1978 figures).

CIVIL SERVICE

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service how much was spent by his Department on official hospitality in the financial year 1987-88.

Mr. Luce: Final figures for 1987-88 are not yet available. The latest estimate of the amount spent by my Department on official hospitality during that period is £14,500.

THE ARTS

Van Dyck Portrait (James, 1st Duke of Hamilton)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on the decision of his reviewing committee to put a four-month stop on the export of Sir Anthony Van Dyck's portrait of James, 1st Duke of Hamilton.

Mr. Luce: The Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art considered Sir Anthony Van Dyck's portrait of James, 1st Duke of Hamilton, in the context of the Waverley criteria, as it does all items referred to it for consideration. The committee concluded that the portrait satisfied the Waverley criteria and, therefore, recommended a four-month deferral of a decision on the export licence application. It further recommended that if, after one month, no public collection had shown interest in acquiring the portrait, consideration should be given to granting an export licence at that stage.

National Theatre Board (Chair)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister for the Arts what relevant experience of arts administration he took into account when appointing Lady Soames as the new chair of the National Theatre Board.

Mr. Luce: The most important quality required for senior posts of this kind is that of leadership.

Museums and Galleries

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts (1) how many staff at *(a)* the Tate Gallery, *(b)* the British museum *(c)* the Victoria and Albert museum work (i) full-time and (ii) part-time on inventory records;

(2) what is his estimate as to how many additional staff would be needed at *(a)* the British museum and *(b)* the Victoria and Albert museum to bring inventories up to date within three years;

(3) what has been (i) the purchase grant and (ii) the conservation grant at *(a)* the Tate Gallery, *(b)* the British museum and *(c)* the Victoria and Albert museum in each of the last 10 years;

(4) what have been the budgets for (i) storage, (ii) security, (iii) research and scholarship, (iv) administration, (v) advertising and manufacturing, (vi) exhibition and (vii) training at *(a)* the Tate gallery, *(b)* the British museum and *(c)* the Victoria and Albert museum in each of the last 10 years;

(5) by how many *(a)* the Tate gallery, *(b)* the British museum and *(c)* the Victoria and Albert museum will need to increase their staffing on assuming responsibility for maintenance from the Property Services Agency in April;

(6) what additional information on the condition of *(a)* the Tate gallery, *(b)* the British museum and *(c)* the Victoria and Albert museum has been produced by the Property Services Agency in the process of preparing to transfer responsibility for maintenance of these museums to their trustees;

(7) what are the aspects of the Property Services Agency's biennial visual survey of *(a)* the Tate gallery, *(b)* the British museum and *(c)* the Victoria and Albert museum; and whether he will publish the last three Property Services Agency biennial surveys of its museums;

(8) what he estimates is the cost of backlog maintenance and restoration of the fabric of the building at *(a)* the British museum and *(b)* the Victoria and Albert museum;

(9) to what posts the additional maintenance staff will be appointed, and at what cost, at *(a)* the Tate gallery, *(b)* the British museum and *(c)* the Victoria and Albert museum;

(10) what estimate has been made as to how many conservation staff would be needed to be employed in order to clear the conservation backlog within 10 years at *(a)* the Tate gallery, *(b)* the British museum and *(c)* the Victoria and Albert museum;

(11) what is the conservation backlog at *(a)* the Tate gallery, *(b)* the British museum and *(c)* the Victoria and Albert museum;

(12) how many individual students have used the research facilities at *(a)* the Tate gallery, *(b)* the British museum and *(c)* the Victoria and Albert museum in each of the last five years;

(13) how many applications for access by students and others for scholarship and research have been received by *(a)* the Tate gallery, *(b)* the British museum and *(c)* the Victoria and Albert museum in each of the last five years;

(14) what was the cost of storage space in *(a)* 1977 and *(b)* 1987 at (i) the Tate gallery, (ii) the British museum and (iii) the Victoria and Albert museum;

(15) when the existing security systems at *(a)* the Tate gallery, *(b)* the British museum and *(c)* the Victoria and Albert museum were (i) installed and (ii) uprated;

(16) what action has been taken to rationalise security procedures at the British museum; and when;

(17) how many security staff were employed at *(a)* the Tate gallery, *(b)* the British museum and *(c)* the Victoria and Albert museum in (i) 1977 and (ii) 1987;

(18) whether he will list all objects stolen or otherwise missing and unaccounted for from *(a)* the Tate gallery, *(b)* the British museum and *(c)* the Victoria and Albert museum in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Luce: I shall write to the hon. Member and will place copies of my letter in the Library of the House.

South Bank Board

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will place in the Library the terms of the trust deed setting up the South Bank Board as an independent body.

Mr. Luce *[pursuant to his reply, 14 March 1988, c. 432.]:* I have today placed a copy of the trust deed in the Library of the House.

DEFENCE

Civilian Employees

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many civilian employees have left the armed services in each year since 1974;

(2) how many civilian employees have left the Army in each year since 1974;

(3) how many people have joined the Army as civilian employees in each year since 1974;

(4) how many people have joined the armed services as civilian employees in each year since 1974;

(5) how many civilians were employed in the Army in each year since 1974.

Mr. Sainsbury: There are no civilians employed in the armed services. Ministry of Defence civil servants work in support of the armed services and the following tables show the numbers of full-time equivalent United Kingdom-based civilian staff, excluding casuals, in the MOD as a whole, in the three service Departments taken together and in the Army Department alone on 1 April for each year from 1974 to 1987 and for 1 March 1988, the latest date for which information is available, together with the available details on intake to and outflow from these areas for the 1985-86 and 1986-87 financial years and for the 1987-88 financial year to 1 March 1988. Such data were not available prior to 1985-86 and the figures given exclude data in respect of a small proportion of staff whose records are not held centrally.

Ministry of Defence United Kingdom based civilian staff[1]

As at 1 April	*Total*	*In navy, army and air force departments*	*In army department*
1974	248,876·0	173,786·0	66,626·0
1975	247,600·0	167,511·0	65,031·0
1976	244,547·0	165,576·0	63,531·0
1977	235,905·0	160,699·0	61,108·0
1978	227,506·0	156,269·0	59,131·0
1979	224,697·0	155,365·0	58,730·0
1980	218,026·0	150,181·0	56,018·0
1981	208,761·0	144,501·0	53,097·0
1982	197,491·0	136,358·0	50,279·0
1983	190,334·0	133,557·0	49,440·0
1984	181,183·0	126,241·0	47,564·0
1985	174,077·0	122,062·0	46,267·5
1986	169,462·5	119,203·5	45,673·5
1987	164,002·5	115,346·0	43,489·0
1988[2]	144,315·5	96,777·0	42,283·0

[1] Full time equivalent staff, excluding casual employees and royal ordnance factory staff.
[2] Figure is for 1 March 1988.

Intake of United Kingdom civilian staff[1]

During	*In total*	*To navy, army and air force departments*	*To army department*
1985-86	13,874·0	10,463·0	5,443·5
1986-87	13,889·0	10,075·5	4,757·0
1987-88[2]	12,688·5	9,345·5	4,939·5

[1] Intake from outside MOD, including transfers from other Government Departments.
[2] Up to 1 March 1988.

Outflow of United Kingdom based civilian staff[1]

During	*In total*	*From navy, army and air force departments*	*From army department*
1985-86	17,925·5	12,999·5	6,037·5
1986-87	18,455·0	14,206·0	6,572·0
1987-88[2]	[3]31,441·5	[3]27,395·5	5,861·5

[1] Outflow to outside MOD, including transfers to other Government Departments.
[2] Up to 1 March 1988.
[3] Includes 16,546 staff lost through the contractorisation of the Devonport and Rosyth dockyards.

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many deaths by suicide have been recorded among civilian employees on defence contracts in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Sainsbury: No record of deaths of civilian employees of defence contractors is kept by my Department.

NATO Exercise (Firth of Clyde)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the size, nature, extent and purpose of the NATO

exercise to be held in the Firth of Clyde in August and September; what consultation is taking place with fishing, recreational, industrial and other interests; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to Exercise Teamwork 88, a major NATO maritime exercise to be held later this year in the Atlantic and Norwegian sea areas.

Detailed plans for associated exercise activity in the Clyde are not yet finalised, but it is expected that some ships will depart from the Clyde. There will probably be some exercise mine-laying activity in the area, and, as part of the routine planning process, mine-laying areas have been discussed and agreed with representatives of fishermen who work the area. A local area warning message about the exercise mine-laying activity will also be issued well in advance of the exercise, in accordance with our normal procedures.

Combat Body Armour

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he now expects combat body armour to enter general service in the Army; and how many vests will be procured during 1989.

Mr. Sainsbury: Subject to the outcome of the troop trial, we plan to introduce combat armour into service in 1989. We plan to procure 15,000 vests during the 1989-90 financial year.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many sets of combat body armour have been produced for troop trialling; when the trials are planned to take place; and when contracts are likely to be placed for bulk delivery.

Mr. Sainsbury: 2,000 sets of combat armour have been procured for the troop trial. It is due to start in May and be completed by November. If the trial is successful, the first contracts for bulk delivery are expected to be placed by April 1989.

Procurement Expenditure

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of his Department's procurement expenditure was spent in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* each of the standard English regions, during the last available financial year.

Mr. Sainsbury: Percentage regional estimates of the Ministry's equipment procurement expenditure during the financial year 1986-87 are as follows:

Area	*Percentage distribution* [1]
Wales	2
Scotland	5
Northern Ireland	1
North	8
Yorkshire and Humberside	3
East Midlands	3
East Anglia	3
South East	49
South West	13
West Midlands	4
North West	9

[1] These individually rounded estimates are based only on the location of the main contractors, and do not allow for subcontract work done in different regions. Expenditure on international collaborative projects is excluded.

Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will meet the management of Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd., to discuss the progress of the inquiries as to *(a)* why a large section of a new nuclear-powered submarine came to be welded on upside down at the Barrow yard and *(b)* why sections of a Trident submarine were lost overboard from a Bahamas registered cargo vessel off the Mull of Galloway and Walney Island in February.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have no plans to meet the management of VSEL at present.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent by his Department on official hospitality in the financial year 1987-88.

Mr. Sainsbury: The amount spent on official hospitality in the financial year 1987-88 was £3,111,845. The amount quoted represents total expenditure borne on defence votes for the provision of official entertainment, apart from a small element of expenditure overseas which has yet to be brought to account. The figure includes therefore expenditure incurred not only by the Ministry of Defence itself, but also by formations and establishments of the armed forces at home and overseas, and by individual officers occupying command and international appointments for which entertainment allowances are payable.

Weapons and Ammunition (Transport)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the categories of weapons currently being transported by road from the base at Caerwent.

Mr. Freeman: No. It is not our practice to provide details of weapons or ammunitions stocks at particular sites.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will consider the safety implications at Royal Air Force Caerwent of changing the transport of ammunition from road to rail.

Mr. Freeman: I am satisfied with the current arrangements for the transport of ammunition to and from RAF Caerwent, which involves movement both by rail and by road.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any propoals to improve the security of the transport of ammunition by contractors employed by the United States Army during collection, parking, and delivery of the loads.

Mr. Freeman: No. These responsibilities fall to the United States authorities who are subject to the same regulations governing the storage and handling of ammunition as Her Majesty's forces.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, in the interests of safety, he will stipulate that at least two drivers per vehicle are employed in the transport of ammunition from Royal Air Force bases.

Mr. Freeman: In accordance with the provisions of the Conveyance by Road of Military Explosives Regulations 1977, attendants are provided for each driver, or, where there is an organised convoy, in the leading, last and every fifth vehicle.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements are made to ensure that drivers of ammunition lorries at the Caerwent base are sober and in a fit condition to drive before their vehicles are loaded at the base, Newport docks or other loading centres.

Mr. Freeman: The authorised explosives representative at the site is responsible for ensuring that ammunition is handled in accordance with the provisions of the Conveyance by Road of Military Explosives Regulations 1977.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if lorries transporting ammunition from the Caerwent base are escorted by military personnel.

Mr. Freeman: No.

Drinking Clubs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review arrangements for the establishment and regulation of drinking clubs on Royal Air Force bases including the admission of civilian personnel.

Mr. Freeman: Bar facilities are limited to the provision of officers' messes, sergeants' messes, junior ranks' clubs and in certain cases civilian canteens. These are well regulated and arrangements are kept under local review. The admission of civilian personnel to service facilities is only by invitation and is subject to strict control of local commanders.

Ammunition (Storage and Handling)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what checks are carried out to ensure that personnel responsible for the storage and handling of ammunition are not working under the influence of alcohol.

Mr. Freeman: The handling of military explosives is strictly regulated. Unit standing orders specify that no person under the influence of alcohol is to be allowed to enter ammunition storage or handling areas. The transportation of military explosives is also strictly regulated (Statutory Instrument 1977 No. 888 — Conveyance by Road of Military Explosives Regulations 1977) and imposes similar restrictions in relation to vehicles.

Benbecula (Visit)

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of the visit of a group of United States military officers to Benbecula on 15 February.

Mr. Freeman: Two United States military officers from HQ 3rd air force transited through Benbecula on 15 February following their visit to a joint RN/RAF exercise in the north atlantic area.

Low-flying Aircraft

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the minimum height at which Royal Air Force aircraft are permitted to fly over land in Cyprus;

(2) what is the minimum height at which Royal Air Force aircraft are permitted to fly over land in Belize;

(3) what is the minimum height at which Royal Air Force aircraft are permitted to fly over land in the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* RAF aircraft are stationed in Cyprus, Belize and the Falkland Islands for operational rather than training purposes. It is not our practice to comment on operational details.

Aircraft Accidents

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the rate of major accidents per 10,000 flying hours, in each year since 1971, for *(a)* Royal Air Force fast jet aircraft, and *(b)* all British military fast jet aircraft.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 31 March 1988]:* Since 1971, the major accident rates for fast jet aircraft of the Royal Air Force have been as follows:

Fast-Jet Cat. 4/5 Accident Rate Per 10,000 Flying Hours

Year	*Rate*
1971	2·35
1972	1·89
1973	1·21
1974	1·19
1975	1·10
1976	1·21
1977	0·80
1978	0·90
1979	1·49
1980	1·13
1981	1·28
1982	1·22
1983	1·25
1984	0·86
1985	0·73
1986	0·58
1987	0·84

The major accident rates since 1971 for all Royal Air Force aircraft are as follows:—

Year	*Major accident rate per 10,000 flying hours*
1971	0·66
1972	0·46
1973	0·51
1974	0·32
1975	0·48
1976	0·58
1977	0·34
1978	0·49
1979	0·52
1980	0·48
1981	0·50
1982	0·49
1983	0·46

Year	Major accident rate per 10,000 flying hours
1984	0·38
1985	0·33
1986	0·31
1987	0·28

Tri-service information of this kind is not recorded centrally and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost and effort.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Green Pound

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the future of the green pound in the light of the intended fiscal harmony within the EEC in 1992.

Mr. MacGregor: The completion of a single Community market for agricultural products by 1992 requires removal of monetary compensatory amounts which are applied in agricultural trade. I have told the Agriculture Council that it would be appropriate to take a measured step in that direction in the context of the 1988 price fixing.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much was spent by his Department on official hospitality in the financial year 1987-88.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The provisional figure for expenditure in 1987-88 is £44,000.

Milk (Hormones)

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take steps to prevent growth hormones being used to boost milk yields; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I see no justification for such steps.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has about the health consequences for milk consumers of additional fat in milk stemming from the use of growth hormones in dairy cattle; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I understand that the fat content of milk over a whole lactation from dairy cows treated with bovine somatotropin lies within the range of fat content of milk from untreated dairy cows.

Surplus Food

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what responses he has received from organisations which wish to take advantage of the European Community scheme for distributing surplus food; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 15 April 1988]:* I shall be making an announcement soon.

Green Pound

Mr. Amos: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to have achieved a 9 per cent. devaluation of the green pound; what steps he proposes to take to reduce the competitive disadvantages currently suffered by British farmers within the EEC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 15 April 1988]* Devaluations of green currencies are generally best made in the context of the annual price fixing, when their effect on consumers and taxpayers, as well as on farmers, can be properly assessed. I have made it clear to the Agriculture Council that some devaluation is justified in the current price-fixing and will be pressing for it. In the pigmeat sector, where MCAs are creating rather than preventing distortions, I am pressing for the abolition of our MCAs, but there are conflicting views within the Council and this will not be easy to achieve.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was spent by his Department on official hospitality in the financial year 1987-88.

Mr. Stanley: £247,882 was spent by the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments.

School Assemblies

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland under what direction or regulation the state schools in Northern Ireland have been given the authority to hold, during their assemblies, a public signing of the peace pledge organised by the "Choose Life Campaign"; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 15 April 1988]:* No directions have been issued to schools on the matter, nor is it covered by any regulation.

Rallies

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) under what direction or regulation the divisional youth offices of the Northern Ireland education and library boards have been given authority to provide transport to a "Choose Life" rally in the King's hall, Belfast, on 23 April;

(2) what is his policy towards the provision of free transport by education and library boards for attendance at rallies to be addressed by persons who have made public statements accusing the security forces of murder; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 15 April 1988]:* The provision of transport in the circumstances described is a matter for decision by individual education and library boards.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Road Accidents

98. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether his Department has made any studies of the cost to the National Health Service of transport-related accidents.

Mrs. Currie: No specific study of these costs has been carried out, but the Department does form an estimate of the likely annual cost of treating casualties of road traffic accidents. The latest available estimate (England 1985) puts the cost at £124 million.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people will receive reduced

housing benefit or no housing benefit as a result of the changes in social security on 11 April because of *(a)* the rise in the rent taper from 60 to 65 per cent, *(b)* the 20 per cent. contribution to rates, *(c)* the £6,000 capital rule, *(d)* the changes to non-dependant deductions and *(e)* other changes, broken down into (i) two-parent families with children, (ii) one-parent families with children, (iii) pensioners, (iv) young single people under 25 years and (iv) others;

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what are his latest estimates of the number of households and global sums concerned in the recent changes in social security benefit in respect of *(a)* the number of households who will be required to pay an additional contribution to rates, *(b)* the median sum concerned and *(c)* the global additional national sum for which affected householders will be now liable;

(2) if he will state in respect of the recent and immediately forthcoming changes in social security benefits *(a)* the number of households who, other than any increased contributions to the rates, will be disadvantaged, *(b)* the median sum per household and *(c)* the total national global reduction for those concerned in *(a)* above.

Mr. Portillo: Answers to these questions in the form requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will indicate the latest number of losers as a result of changes in housing benefit in each local authority area in England.

Mr. Portillo: I regret that the information is not available.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will break down the £650 million to be saved on housing benefit into claimant categories of (i) families with children, (ii) pensioners, (iii) young single people under 25 years and (iv) others; and what proportion of the savings is due to the 20 per cent. contribution to rates in each case.

Mr. Portillo: We estimate that the requirement for ratepayers to pay a minimum of 20 per cent. of domestic rates saves some two thirds of the total housing benefit saving of £650 million. It is not possible to break these figures down by claimant categories.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the cost of raising the level of savings under which housing benefit is payable to £10,000 on the assumption that *(a)* the rules for other benefits are unaltered, *(b)* the interest actually received on savings and not an arbitrarily assumed return is used in assessing benefit and *(c)* no change is made to the rule that those with savings of under £3,000 receive benefit in full.

Mr. Portillo: Of the order of £60 million.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many of those receiving housing benefit in each of the last three years had *(a)* no savings, *(b)* savings of under £3,000, *(c)* savings of £3,000 and under £6,000, *(d)* savings of £6,000 and under £10,000 and *(e)* savings of over £10,000.

Mr. Portillo: I regret that we hold no data on the capital holdings of those who have received housing benefit over the last three years. Government estimates of the effects of the new capital rule are based on extrapolations from the family expenditure survey.

Bronchitis and Emphysema

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has now received the reports of the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council investigations into the possible extension of bronchitis and emphysema as industrial diseases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eadie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to have the report from the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council dealing with the prescription of chronic bronchitis and emphysema as an industrial disease; and whether he intends to ensure it is published without delay.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Members to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) and the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) on 14 March 1988 at column *472*.

Nurses

Mr. Prescott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how his Department calculates the number of nurses registered with the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting who are not currently practising nursing, and who are to be targeted in the campaign to recruit and retain nurses launched on Thursday 24 March.

Mr. Newton: An analysis has been carried out of the live register of United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (UKCC), concentrating particularly on those nurses, midwives and health visitors who have confirmed or updated their registration details, but not paid the new periodic fee. The rationale for concentrating on this group is that, while their non-payment of the fee implies that they are not working in nursing, their desire to maintain a correct record of their registration particulars suggests the possibility of their availability for nursing work at a later date or if work become available to suit their personal circumstances. The UKCC estimates there will be a United Kingdom total of 85,000 people in this category once the periodic fee exercise is complete. The UKCC has advised district health authorities of the service it is able to provide in forwarding recruitment literature to this group of people.

Oldham Home-making Scheme

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received from Oldham metropolitan borough concerning the Oldham home-making scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We have received representations about the delay in RHA funding for this scheme. It was one of a number considered by the RHA against its target of resettling a record level of 150 patients in the community in 1988-89. I understand that three schemes for Salford, Bolton and Manchester have been given priority for this year with other schemes including the Oldham home-making scheme remaining under consideration for funding in subsequent years.

Age Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the value in 1971 money of the 25p age allowance for those aged over 80 years, which was introduced in 1971.

Mr. Scott: At 1971 prices, the 25p age addition is currently worth five pence.

Nursing Homes

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he has taken to *(a)* ensure that health authorities and social services departments were made aware of the fact that from 11 April elderly people will no longer have access to private nursing homes until their own homes have been sold; and *(b)* increase funds for community care provision to cater for the increased number of elderly people who need nursing care and have to remain at home.

Mr. Portillo: It is not necessary for a person to sell his home before entering private care. However, when he takes up permanent residence in a residential care home or nursing home he will not be entitled to income support if the net value of his former home together with any other capital goods he has exceeds £6,000. The value of the previous home will be disregarded in certain circumstances including if it is occupied by the person's partner.

The need for additional community services should not arise and there was no need to consult social services or health authorities.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what discussions he has had with the major clearing banks regarding the availability of loans for persons needing immediate access to capital locked up in their home for use to pay nursing home fees, in the light of the withdrawal under the new social security regulations of loans from his Department for this purpose.

Mr. Portillo: We have written to all the major clearing banks. They have assured us that loans will be made available in these circumstances, subject to the normal conditions.

Local Offices (Partitions)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the total cost of strengthening partitions in public sections in his Department's offices in Bradford south and west; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Work to strengthen partitions has been carried out only at Bradford, south local office and this cost £309·75.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the total cost of strengthening partitions in public sections of his Department's offices in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

There has been no change in the Department's policy with regard to the level of protection provided for staff. Local office managers have responsibility for deciding the appropriate level of protection, in consultation with their local staff and trade unions.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how much was spent by his Department on official hospitality in the financial year 1987-88.

Mr. Moore: Estimated expenditure on official hospitality in the financial year 1987-88 is £86,250. In addition, the Department spent £56,235 in its role as host to the world summit on AIDS.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his latest estimate of the number of people on supplementary benefit broken down into (i) claimants, (ii) dependants, (iii) children and (iv) families with children.

Mr. Portillo: In February 1986, the latest date for which information is available, the position was as follows:

	Number
Claimants	4,938,000
Partners	1,127,000
Children under 16 years	2,123,000
Other dependants	104,000
Families with children under 16 years	1,137,000

Source: Annual Statistical Enquiry.

Industrial Death Benefit

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services for what reasons he has decided to withdraw future payments to widows in respect of industrial death benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Buchan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the withdrawal of industrial death benefit from widows to whom it was awarded before April 1988, in the light of his Department's social security notes of February 1988, which stated that in existing cases payment would continue.

Mr. Scott: Industrial death benefit has been abolished in respect of deaths occurring on or after 11 April 1988. In these cases, industrial widows will have access to the same weekly benefits as national insurance widows, including the tax-free lump sum of £1,000, where appropriate, but they will not have to satisfy the contribution conditions. Where an industrial death occurred before 11 April 1988, industrial death benefit will still be payable, though its higher weekly rate has been aligned with that of national insurance widows' pension. This has entailed removal of the industrial preference of 55p a week. However, people in receipt of industrial death benefit will retain the important right to receive other benefits based on their own contributions (for example, retirement pension) on top of their death benefit. The reasons for these changes were set out in a consultation paper on the industrial injuries scheme, issued by the Department in December 1985, and were based on the proposals contained in the 1981 White Paper "Reform of the Industrial Injuries Scheme" Cmnd. 8402.

National Insurance

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total amount collected from

(a) employers and *(b)* employees in national insurance contributions in the last financial year; and what amount from these contributions went into the National Health Service funds.

Mr. Portillo: The information is as follows:

Estimated receipts[1] from Class 1 National Insurance Contributions in 1987-88 (Great Britain)

£ million

	Estimated receipts	*Allocated to National Health Service*
(a) Employers	[2]13,700	1,250
(b) Employees	12,600	1,350

[1] Provisional estimated outturn.
[2] Net of Statutory Sick Pay and Statutory Maternity Pay deductions of £950 million.

Social Fund

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what local contingency arrangements have been made in the Port Talbot and Neath local offices of his Department in the event of the office's social fund budgets being exhausted before the end of the 1988-89 financial year.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) on 4 March at column *746*.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the 1988-89 social fund budget for his Department's offices serving the London borough of Barnet.

Mr. Scott: The local offices serving the London borough of Barnet are Barnet, Edgware, Hendon, Highgate, Neasden and Wood Green. Information on their social fund allocations for 1988-89 was contained in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) on 4 November at columns *774-81*.

Pensioner Households (Expenditure)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what surveys have been undertaken to discover the extent to which pensioner households have different expenditure patterns from those of other households.

Mr. Scott: The annual family expenditure survey measures the income and expenditure patterns of a nationally representative sample of households, and the results, which are published, are broken down between pensioner and non-pensioner households.

Social Security Upratings

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will make it his policy to use the all-items retail prices index to uprate income support at future social security upratings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: We will announce our decisions concerning the uprating of income support at the time of the general uprating statement in the autumn.

Expenditure

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table showing the real increase in expenditure in social security between 1978-79 and 1987-88 broken down into the main reasons for the increase on the same basis as contained in the "Government's Expenditure Plans 1987-88 to 1989-90", volume II, 3.15, paragraph 39.

Mr. Scott: Over the period 1978-79 to 1987-88 the social security programme increased by £13 billion (at 1987-88 prices) or by 39 per cent. in real terms. The main reasons for the increase were:

(i) £4 billion due to real increases in the average amounts of benefit paid (whether due to changes in the basic rates of benefit or other factors)
(ii) £3·75 billion due to increased numbers of unemployed people receiving benefits
(iii) £2·5 billion due to increased numbers of retirement pensioners
(iv) £2·25 billion due to increased numbers receiving disability benefits
(v) £1·5 billion due to increased numbers of single parents receiving benefits
(vi) £0·75 billion reflecting the increased costs of administering a larger number of claims for benefits

offset by reductions of:

(vii) £1 billion reflecting the introduction of statutory sick pay and a decrease in the incidence of short term sickness.
(viii) £0·75 billion from reductions in the numbers of widows and children and in the numbers of women receiving maternity benefits.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the current numbers of people waiting for (i) urgent and (ii) non-urgent operations in each specialty in the Leicestershire district health authority.

Mr. Newton: The latest available information is given in the table. The September 1987 waiting list figures are being compiled and will be published as soon as possible. Following the recommendations of the steering group on the health services information, the classification of cases as urgent or non-urgent has been dropped, and much more detailed information about waiting times will be available.

Patients on in-patient waiting list at 31 March 1987
District health authority: Leicestershire

Specialty	Total	Numbers Urgent cases		Numbers Non-urgent cases		Percentage non-urgent cases on list more than one year as percentage of total
		All	On list more than one month	All	On list more than one year	
General medicine	6	—	—	—	—	0·0
Paediatrics	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Thoracic medicine	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Dermatology	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Neurology	11	—	—	—	—	0·0
Cardiology	183	—	—	—	—	0·0
Rehabilitation	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Genito-urinary medicine	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Rheumatology	4	—	—	—	—	0·0
Geriatrics	10	—	—	—	—	0·0
Units for younger disabled	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
General surgery	928	—	—	—	44	4·7
Ear, nose and throat	1,553	—	—	—	195	12·6
Traumatic and orthopaedic	1,340	—	—	—	218	16·3
Ophthalmology	727	—	—	—	29	4·0
Radiotherapy	14	—	—	—	—	0·0
Urology	452	—	—	—	7	1·5
Plastic surgery	1,091	—	—	—	568	52·1
Thoracic surgery	446	—	—	—	22	4·9
Oral surgery	260	—	—	—	30	11·5
Orthodontics	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Neurosurgery	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Gynaecology	1,151	—	—	—	10	0·9
Psychiatry children	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Mental handicap	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Mental illness	15	—	—	—	—	0·0
Adolescent psychiatry units	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
G. P. other	9	—	—	—	—	0·0
G. P. dental	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Accident and emergency	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Anaesthetics	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Audiological medicine	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Cardiac surgery	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Child assessment unit	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Clinical pharmacology and therapeutics	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Endocrinology	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Forensic psychiatry	10	—	—	—	1	10·0
Gastroenterology	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Haematology	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Medical oncology	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Nephrology	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Paediatric surgery	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Pathology	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Psychogeriatric	68	—	—	—	1	1·5
Radiology	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Restorative dentistry	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Spinal injuries unit	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Paediatric dentistry	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Other	0	—	—	—	—	0·0
Surgical specialties—*sub-total*	7,962	—	—	—	1,123	14·1
All specialties—*total*	8,278	—	—	—	1,125	13·6

Consultants

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has on the proportion up to 10 per cent. of National Health Service salaries earned by consultants from private practice.

Mr. Newton: This information is not collected centrally.

AIDS

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects his Department to publish Dr. Joe Smith's report on monitoring HIV infection; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: As I said in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) on 9 February at column *168*, we propose to publish this report. I cannot yet give a precise date, but expect it to be fairly shortly.

Yorkshire RHAs

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the financial position at the end of the first half of the current budgetary year of each of the 17 Yorkshire regional health authority districts, together with the four districts in South Yorkshire covered by the Trent regional health authority.

Mr. Newton: Both the initial allocation of funds and the release of funds to DHAs during the year are the responsibility of the regional health authority concerned. The hon. Member may therefore wish to contact the chairmen of the Yorkshire and Trent RHAs for details of the allocations for 1988-89. At the same time, she may wish to discuss arrangements for receiving details regarding districts mid year financial positions when they become available.

Disregard Threshold

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the cost of raising the disregard threshold for social security benefits from £6,000 to £10,000.

Mr. Portillo: £70 million, assuming that the tariff income begins at £3,000.

Doctors' Pay

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on doctors' pay.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Member must await the publication of the report of the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration.

Adjudication Officers' Guide

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when the adjudication officers' guide will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo *[pursuant to his reply, 31 March 1988, c. 661-62]:* In addition to the adjudication officer's guide, the third annual report of the Chief Adjudication Officer is being published today and copies have been placed in the Library. It provides information on the standards of social security adjudication. I thank the CAO for his detailed report and I welcome the recognition that the new income support scheme and other aspects of the reform of social security should lead to an improvement in adjudication standards.

National Health Service Building Programme

Mr. Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the National Health Service capital expenditure projects, costing more than £1 million, which have been completed in the Staffordshire, Moorlands parliamentary constituency during the past 14 years and those projected in the next five years.

Mrs. Currie *[pursuant to her reply, 12 April 1988, c. 81]:* I am sorry that my earlier reply was incomplete.

The information requested is as follows:

Completed schemes:

New Cheadle geriatric unit—completed July 1987—cost £5 million.

Projected schemes:

Leek Moorlands hospital redevelopment — estimated completion date 1989—cost £2·079 million.

Biddulph Neighbourhood hospital — estimated completion date 1993—cost £1·65 million.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Jamaica and Windward Islands

97. **Mr. Sackville:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received about bilateral trade agreements with Jamaica and the Windward Islands.

Mr. Maude: None.

Space

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what progress has been made in identifying a new director general for the British National Space Centre; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is the Government's policy on the RADARSAT and Columbus space station projects; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he is taking to review the position of British participation in European space ventures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Government have considered carefully the options for the Columbus polar platform and RADARSAT earth observation projects. I am pleased to announce that we shall be proposing today to our European Space Agency partners that the United Kingdom should take a leading role in the polar platform. This represents a sensible next step, based on our consistent policy of supporting earth observation, where a commercial market can be developed through the acquisition and processing of data for sale to end users. We joined the ERS-1 project under ESA in March 1982; ERS-1 is due to be launched in 1990. I announced on 10 February 1988, at column 250, our decision to establish a new Earth observation data centre at Farnborough costing an additional £20 million. We are now set to proceed with our next major project, the polar platform, at a cost, including the associated instrumentation, of over £250 million during the next 10 years.

I am also pleased to announce that industry will be contributing up to £5 million of the cost of the polar platform. This demonstrates in the clearest possible way British industry's support for our decision and its confidence in the longer-term commercial prospects.

Having decided to enter Columbus, the Government will not be entering the Canadian RADARSAT project. RADARSAT is a good project and we have spent £4·5 million examining it carefully, but it is essentially a one-off project on a smaller scale than Columbus and we would not have offered as good a base for commercial exploitation. To pursue both Columbus and RADARSAT would involve expensive parallel development of different platforms. We expect to receive most of the information RADARSAT would provide through our membership of ERS-1 and Columbus.

Over the last 10 months, we have been urged to enter a wide range of space projects which would have cost the

taxpayer well over £1 billion in total. I believe that I have now made a sensible choice to join those projects which offer the best value for money for the British taxpayer and British industry. We have also appointed a new director general for the British National Space Centre. He is Mr. Arthur Pryor, a senior official in my Department. One of his main tasks will be to work closely with industry in order to maximise returns from our new investment in the polar platform.

Tyneside City Action Team

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the annual expenditure of the Tyneside city action team for 1985-86, 1986-87 the half year to October 1987, indicating the amounts which have been spent on *(a)* research and development, *(b)* enterprise agencies, *(c)* advice and consultancy to small businesses, *(d)* grants to service and *(e)* grants to manufacturing industry.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The city action team based in Newcastle comprises the regional directors of my Department, the Department of Employment and Department of the Environment. Expenditure by the three Departments in the area of CAT for the period requested by the hon. Member was:

Year	*Amount £*
1985-86	109,181,000
1986-87	162,501,000
April to October 1987	84,728,000

Expenditure in the categories requested was as follows:

£000s

	1985-86	*1986-87*	*April-October 1987*
Research and Development	50	73	27
Enterprise Agencies	nil	100	87
Advice and Consultancy to small businesses	2,347	3,138	1,385
Grants to service industry	1,394	2,204	2,503
Grants to manufacturing industry	24,968	52,215	25,871

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what liaison arrangements he has established between the Northern industrial development advisory board, the Tyneside city action team and the Tyne and Wear urban development corporation.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The main task of the North Eastern industrial development advisory board is to advise on applications for regional selective assistance under section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 and on industrial opportunities in the region. The regional director attends the board and is also a member of the city action team. The city action team also works closely with the Tyne and Wear urban development corporation through a system of regular meetings.

South Africa

Mr. Steel: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he is taking to ensure that United Nations Security Council resolution 558 is being respected within Britain.

Mr. Maude: We implement fully the terms of the voluntary United Nations Council Resolution 558 of 1984.

Mr. Steel: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on the advertisement of South African-manufactured arms in British publications.

Mr. Butcher: The Government are not aware of such advertisements. However, we operate a strict and rigorously controlled embargo on the import of arms, ammunition, military vehicles and paramilitary equipment from South Africa.

Engagements

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list his official engagements in the County Palatine since he assumed office as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have undertaken seven official engagements in the County Palatine since I assumed the office of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, twice in my capacity as Chancellor, as follows:

14 July 1987 pm
Minister of State engagement: Keynote speech and panel discussion at the Alvey Conference, university of Manchester institute of science and technology, Manchester.

24 July 1987 am
Chancellor of the Duchy engagement: Chancellor, Mrs. Clarke, Mr. Smith (Principal Private Secretary) and Mrs. Smith joined Her Majesty the Queen for lunch at Crewe Hall Farm, Cheshire.

24 July 1987 pm
Minister of State engagement: Launch of Preston task force at Preston town hall. Accompanied by Mr. Atkins.
Chancellor of the Duchy engagement: Attendance at Magistrate's Association annual summer training conference round-up dinner at Lancaster university, keynote speaker right hon. Douglas Hurd, MP.

9 October 1987 pm
Minister of State engagement: BBC Radio 4's "Any Questions Panel" in Liverpool.

19 February 1988
Political ngagements: Meeting with Manchester action committee (St. James' Club, Manchester); tour of Salford quays; Cheadle Conservative association champagne buffet and reception (Bramhall).

26 February 1988 am
Inner cities visit: accompanied Prime Minister for launch of information technology institute at Salford university; opening of Campbell's new manufacturing facility at Salford quays.

14 June 1988
Inner cities visit: Inner cities working breakfast in Liverpool. Accompanied by Mr. Trippier. Opportunities for other Liverpool inner city/regional engagements to be added as the Minister wishes.

13 July 1988 (notified to DTI-NW am 15 April 1988)
Inner cities visit: Opening new premises at Plastics (Manchester) Limited in Levenshulme. Mr. Clarke has also agreed to open Hoskyn Group Plc's new premises in Sale. Again, opportunities for other Manchester/Salford inner city or regional engagements to be added, as the Minister wishes.

Regional Development Grant

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the amounts of regional development grants in Lancashire in each year since 1975; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It is not possible to provide figures in respect of the "old" regional development grant scheme because information was not maintained by individual areas.

The following regional development grants have been offered to businesses in the west Lancashire district, which is the area in Lancashire with development area status and eligible for regional development grant:

	£
1984-85	12,000
1985-86	1,405,422
1986-87	2,742,827
1987-88	7,150,822

Burton Group

Mr. Blair: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) when he estimates his Department will complete the section 447 investigation into the Burton Group; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he has considered ordering a section 432 investigation into the Burton Group's takeover of Debenham; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: Inquiries under section 447 of the Companies Act 1985 into Burtons are in progress, as the company has itself stated. Beyond that I cannot comment.

Takeovers

Mr. Blair: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has considered ordering a section 432 investigation into the Guinness Group takeover of Bells; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: The inspectors appointed on 28 November 1986 to investigate the affairs and membership of Guinness may inquire into this matter to the extent that they consider necessary.

Mr. Blair: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will institute an inquiry into whether any two or more of *(a)* the following persons, Roger Seelig, Anthony Parnes, Lord Spens, David Mayhew, Gerald Ronson and Sir Jack Lyons and *(b)* the companies Morgan Grenfell or Cazenove have been involved jointly in any takeover other than Guinness's takeover of Distillers within the past five years.

Mr. Maude: No.

Enterprise Initiative

Mr. Blair: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what his Department intends to spend on promoting the enterprise initiative in the financial year 1987-88.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Expenditure by my Department on promoting the enterprise initiative during 1987-88 totalled £6·8 million.

TRANSPORT

Channel Tunnel

7. **Mr. Nicholas Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss British Rail's investment proposals under section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act.

Mr. David Mitchell: Not at this stage. BR is not required to publish its section 40 plan until the end of 1989. It intends to use the time to consult widely with interested parties in the regions.

Accident Statistics

15. **Mr. Gareth Wardell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people were injured on the roads in 1987.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Too many.

The number of casualties in 1987 is provisionally estimated at 308,000. This is the lowest number recorded in any year since 1958. Motor traffic has increased by 380 per cent. since 1958. The provisional estimate of the number of deaths, at 5,110, is the lowest since 1954. The number of pedestrians killed is the lowest since records began in 1926.

A full breakdown of the provisional estimates is given in statistical bulletin No. [88]10 which is available in the Library.

Metropolitan Counties

16. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had with bus operators in metropolitan county areas.

Mr. David Mitchell: I met a delegation of public transport company managing directors from the metropolitan areas on 22 September 1987. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, also met representatives of the Bus and Coach Council on 22 February of this year. From time to time I meet various operators to keep myself informed as the benefits of deregulation unfold.

30. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what change there has been in the number of passengers using bus services in the metropolitan counties following bus deregulation.

Mr. David Mitchell: In 1986-87, the latest date for which figures are available, bus patronage in the metropolitan areas outside London declined by 12 per cent. over the previous year.

Air Traffic Control

17. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the ability of United Kingdom air traffic control to handle the volume of traffic expected during the summer months.

Mr. Channon: The Civil Aviation Authority tells me that the national air traffic services will be able to handle the traffic expected this summer, subject to peak hour flow management.

DEFECTIVE PRINTING

Railways (Overcrowding)

18. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has as to which rail lines are currently subject to particular overcrowding.

55. **Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has as to which rail lines are currently subject to particular overcrowding.

Mr. David Mitchell I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) on 29 March at column *455*.

35. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish all information he has on overcrowding on trains.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have asked the board to set out, in its annual report and accounts, progress towards achievement of its quality of service objectives which, for network South East, include load factor standards.

42. **Mr. Snape:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has discussed with the chairman of British Rail the problem of overcrowding on trains; and if he will make a statement.

49. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has discussed with the chairman of British Rail the problem of overcrowding on trains; and if he will make a statement.

57. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has discussed with the chairman of British Rail the problem of overcrowding on trains; and if he will make a statement.

66. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has discussed with the chairman of British Rail the problem of overcrowding on trains; and if he will make a statement.

72. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ask the chairman of British Rail to meet him to discuss overcrowding on trains.

Mr. David Mitchell: I meet the chairman regularly to discuss matters of mutual interest including, from time to time, quality of service.

Road Transport (Driving Hours)

19. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the proposed European Economic Community regulation to amend the permitted driving hours in road transport.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We still await a formal proposal from the European Commission to amend the drivers' hours regulations.

Transport Safety

20. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to seek to increase his enforcement powers in relation to transport safety.

21. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to seek to increase his powers to enforce safety standards on foreign companies operating within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Channon: The safe movement of people and goods is one of my top priorities irrespective of whether the operator is British or foreign. Effective enforcement of safety standards is an essential and regular part of that. I keep my powers for this purpose under regular review but have no immediate plans to seek to increase them.

34. **Ms. Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to provide funding specifically for improvements in transport safety.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Transport safety is one of our main priorities. A large part of the resources the Department provides are directed to maintaining and improving it.

64. **Ms. Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy that safety should be a higher priority than financial cost in making regulations concerning transport policy.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The main reasons why we make transport regulations are to ensure safety and provide environmental protection. When drawing up regulations, we also take account of convenience and the efficient use of resources.

British Rail

22. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of British Rail; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend last met the chairman of British Rail on 28 March. A variety of railway matters were discussed.

Road Accidents

23. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many deaths have occurred in transport related incidents in the United Kingdom in the past year.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The number of deaths in transport accidents in Great Britain during the period July 1986 to June 1987, the most recently available 12 months, was 5,860.

These statistics are obtained from death registration data and include all transport-related accidental deaths.

Approximately 95 per cent. of these accidents are accounted for by road accidents. The remaining accidents are accounted for by rail, sea and air accidents.

Departmental Staff (Safety Matters)

24. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he intends to increase staffing levels for safety-related matters within his Department.

38. **Mr. Caborn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of all staff in his Department are employed to improve safety standards in transport.

56. **Mr. McTaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff in his Department are employed solely to enforce or improve safety standards in transport.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Fostering and improving transport safety is one of the objectives of the Department and is of concern to all staff. Some groups with particular responsibilities for supervision and enforcement are:

	Number
Railways inspectorate	37
Surveyor generals organisation	407
HM Coastguard	569
Driver testing and training	1,715
Road safety policy and vehicle standards and engineering	92
Vehicle inspectorate	1,550
Vehicle components approval	70
Air accidents investigation branch	41

Many of the 628 staff at the Transport and Road Research Laboratory are directly engaged on safety improvement research, and a major part of the work of the 5,401 staff at DVLC is concerned with documentation required for road safety purposes.

Road Haulage Cabotage

25. **Mr. Ingram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last discussed road haulage cabotage with other EEC Transport Ministers.

Mr. Channon: On 16 December last year, at the Transport Council in Brussels.

National Bus Company

26. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many former constituent businesses of the National Bus Company have been bought by their management; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: Some 40 of the National Bus Company's 70 privatised subsidiaries were bought by management or employee teams. This excellent figure reflects our policy of spreading wealth in the community instead of concentrating it in the hands of the state.

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list, in chronological order with sale dates, each of the National Bus Company subsidiaries sold to date, stating in each case the individual or company to whom the company was sold, and whether the sale was to a management buy-out, staff buy-out or outside bidder.

Mr. David Mitchell: The information requested is as follows:

	Subsidiary	Date of sale	Purchaser
1	National Holidays Ltd.	14 July 1986	Pleasurama PLC
2	Devon General Ltd.	19 August 1986	Management
3	Badgerline Ltd.	23 September 1986	Management
4	The Southern Vectis Omnibus Co. Ltd.	7 October 1986	Management
5	Cheltenham and Gloucester Omnibus Co. Ltd.	31 October 1986	Management
6	Maidstone and District Motor Services Ltd.	7 November 1986	Management
7	Cambus Ltd.	5 December 1986	Management
8	PMT Ltd.	15 December 1986	Management
9	South Midland Ltd.	19 December 1986	Management
10	Midland Red (West) Ltd.	22 December 1986	Management
11	Midland Red Coaches Ltd.	22 December 1986	Management
12	The Eastern National Omnibus Co. Ltd.	23 December 1986	Management
13	Trent Motor Traction Company Ltd.	30 December 1986	Management
14	City of Oxford Motor Services Ltd.	15 January 1987	Management
15	The Yorkshire Traction Co. Ltd.	28 January 1987	Management
16	West Riding Automobile Co. Ltd.	29 January 1987	Management
17	National Travel (East) Ltd.	29 January 1987	ATL Holdings Ltd.
18	East Yorkshire Motor Services Ltd.	3 February 1987	Management
19	Eastern Counties Omnibus Co. Ltd.	26 February 1987	Management
20	Alder Valley Engineering Ltd.	5 March 1987	Frontsource Ltd.
21	Bristol Engineering Ltd.	5 March 1987	Frontsource Ltd.
22	Carlyle Works Ltd.	5 March 1987	Frontsource Ltd.
23	Eastern National Engineering Ltd.	5 March 1987	Frontsource Ltd.
24	H & D Distribution Ltd.	5 March 1987	Frontsource Ltd.
25	Kent Engineering (NBC) Ltd.	5 March 1987	Frontsource Ltd.
26	Southdown Engineering Services Ltd.	5 March 1987	Frontsource Ltd.
27	United Counties Engineering Ltd.	5 March 1987	Frontsource Ltd.
28	East Kent Road Car Company Ltd.	5 March 1987	Management
29	Hampshire Bus Company Ltd.	2 April 1987	Stagecoach Ltd.
30	Pilgrim Coaches Ltd.	2 April 1987	Stagecoach Ltd.
31	National Welsh Omnibus Services Ltd.	7 May 1987	Management
32	Northern General Transport Co. Ltd.	7 May 1987	Management
33	Provincial Bus Company Ltd.	8 May 1987	Management/Employees
34	South Wales Transport Company Ltd.	8 May 1987	Management
35	Brighton and Hove Bus and Coach Co. Ltd.	8 May 1987	Management
36	Wilts and Dorset Bus Company Ltd.	24 June 1987	Management
37	Shamrock and Rambler Coaches Ltd.	3 July 1987	Drawlane Ltd.
38	Cumberland Motor Services Ltd.	22 July 1987	Stagecoach Holdings Ltd.
39	Wessex National Ltd.	23 July 1987	Management
40	Western National Ltd.	6 August 1987	Plympton Coachlines
41	Milton Keynes City Bus Ltd.	7 August 1987	Management
42	Midland Fox Ltd.	18 August 1987	Management
43	Luton and District Transport Ltd.	21 August 1987	Management-Employees
44	West Yorkshire Road Car Company Ltd.	25 August 1987	Mr. Alan Stephenson + Parkdale Holdings plc

	Subsidiary	Date of sale	Purchaser
45	Bristol Omnibus Co. Ltd.	18 September 1987	Midland Red West Holdings Ltd.
46	Voyage National SA	23 September 1987	Gurna Ltd.
47	Southdown Motor Services Ltd.	2 October 1987	Management
48	Northumbria Motor Services Ltd.	21 October 1987	Management
49	Alder Valley South Ltd.	30 October 1987	Frontsource Ltd.
50	United Counties Omnibus Company Ltd.	18 November 1987	Stagecoach Holdings Ltd.
51	United Automobile Services Ltd.	2 December 1987	West Riding Automobile (through Caldaire Ltd.)
52	Ambassador Travel (Eastern Counties) Ltd.	4 December 1987	Eastern Counties Omnibus Company-Management
53	Midland Red (South) Ltd.	10 December 1987	Cheltenham and Gloucester Omnibus Co. (through Western Travel Ltd.)
54	Berks Bucks Bus Company Ltd.	15 December 1987	Len Wright Travel
55	Hastings and District Transport Ltd.	16 December 1987	Management
56	Crosville Wales Ltd.	21 December 1987	Management
57	London Country Bus (North West) Ltd.	5 January 1988	Management
58	Midland Red (North) Ltd.	27 January 1988	Drawlane Ltd.
59	Lincolnshire Road Car Company Ltd.	28 January 1988	Yorkshire Traction Company Ltd.
60	East Midland Motor Services Ltd.	5 February 1988	Management
61	London Country Bus (South West) Ltd.	19 February 1988	Drawlane Ltd.-Speyhawk Land and Estates Ltd.
62	Gatwick Engineering Company Ltd.	29 February 1988	Frontsource Ltd.
63	Ribble Motor Services Ltd.	2 March 1988	Management
64	Kentish Bus and Coach Company Ltd.	15 March 1988	Northumbria Motor Services (through Proudmutual Ltd.)
65	North Western Road Car Company Ltd.	16 March 1988	Drawlane Ltd.
66	National Express Ltd.	17 March 1988	Management
67	National Travelworld Ltd.	24 March 1988	Badgerline Holdings Ltd.
68	Crosville Motor Services Ltd.	25 March 1988	ATL Holdings Ltd.
69	North Devon Ltd.	29 March 1988	Management
70	Southern National Ltd.	29 March 1988	Management

In view of the number of people involved in these purchases it would not be practicable to list them individually. If the hon. Gentleman would like details of particular sales perhaps he would write to me.

It should be noted that a number of management and third party sales included provision for equity participation by employees generally.

Airline Competition

27. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on the future of airline competition policy in the United Kingdom and in the European Community.

Mr. Channon: I have received many representations from airlines and other interests, the majority supporting competition in the provision of air transport services.

65. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement as to the implications for airline competition of the recent statement by the European Commissioner for Transport.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend welcomes the agreement reached between the European Commission and British Airways, following the merger with British Caledonian Airways. The agreement is compatible with BA's proposals accepted by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, which opened up major opportunities for other United Kingdom airlines to operate services on domestic and European routes.

The Government remain committed to their policy, set out in the 1984 White Paper, of encouraging a sound competitive multi-airline industry, promoting competition in all markets, and ensuring adequate safeguards against anti-competitive behaviour.

Nationalised Industries (Safety)

28. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to seek to extend his powers to enforce safety improvements on nationalised industries.

Mr. Channon: None at present, but I shall be studying carefully any recommendations made by the investigation into the King's Cross fire on the monitoring and enforcement of safety provisions.

Road Safety

29. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on current standards of road safety.

Mr. Bottomley: We are making good progress. Despite a 5 per cent. increase in traffic, last year road accident deaths were down 5 per cent., seriously injured down 8 per cent. and child pedestrian casualties down 9 per cent.

Most road accident indicators show a decline over the last 20 years when related to the growth in traffic. We have the best road safety record in the European Community and one of the best in the world. That is no cause for complacency.

In publishing last July the report of the inter-departmental review of road safety we set the objective of accelerating the reduction in road accident casualties so as to reduce the number by one third—from 300,000 per year to 200,000—by the year 2000.

Motorways

31. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further proposals he has for motorway road construction and repairs to existing motorways.

Mr. Channon: We are continuing to develop and improve the motorway network. Seven schemes are currently under construction and a further 26 are in preparation with a total value of over £1 billion.

There is a continuing programme of major structural maintenance. In 1988-89 we expect to renew some 80 miles of existing motorway.

Network SouthEast

33. **Mr. Cartwright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of British Rail to discuss passenger safety on Network SouthEast.

Mr. David Mitchell: I meet the chairman regularly to discuss various matters of mutual interest. At our last meeting the chairman briefed me on the recent tragic incident on the Orpington-Victoria line and on the measures that British Rail is considering in the light of that.

Passenger Transport Authorities'

36. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairmen of the passenger transport authorities; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend saw chairmen of the passenger transport authorities on 13 July 1987 to discuss precept control. Since then, I have seen the chairmen of some of the authorities to discuss their individual expenditure levels and precept limits; the chairman of the West Yorkshire passenger transport authority also led a delegation of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities which called on me on 2 March to make representations about the proposed change of the passenger transport authorities from precepting to billing authorities.

Manchester Airport

37. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next intends to visit Manchester airport.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans for a visit.

Motorways (Speed Limits)

39. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of motorway traffic he estimates exceeds the mandatory speed limit.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A national speed survey was carried out in 1987 and the results were published in January. This showed:

	Percentage exceeding limit	
	1987	*1983*
(a) Vehicle subject to 70 mph		
Cars	36	40
Two-wheeled motor vehicles	50	47
Buses and coaches	9	31
Vans	22	19
Minibuses	12	22
(b) Vehicles subject to 60 mph		
HGVs—Rigid	21	30
HGVs—Articulated	22	50
(c) Vehicles subject to 50 mph when survey taken in 1983, now 60 mph		
Car towing	7	64

Although the proportion exceeding the 70 mph limit on motorways has fallen, there has regrettably been no decrease in the proportion exceeding 75 mph.

London Underground

40. **Ms. Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department last made a study of the threat to passenger safety caused by the danger of fires on the London Underground.

Mr. David Mitchell: Fire is one of the risks to passenger safety that is monitored by the Department's Railway Inspectorate. Specific studies of this risk were made in connection with the inspectorate's formal inquiries into the underground fires at Finsbury Park (1976), Goodge Street (1981) and Bounds Green (1982). Published reports are available on these inquiries. Following the fire at Oxford Circus in 1984, London Underground Limited and the London fire brigade carried out a joint inquiry. The inspectorate has monitored the implementation of the inquiries' recommendations, which address wider issues of fire safety generally on the underground. The inspectorate also studies the reports of the annual fire prevention inspections carried out by the London fire brigade. Where new work is concerned, such as the Heathrow extension, the inspectorate requires an assurance that the fire authority is satisfied as to fire precautions before the works are opened to the public.

54. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on safety standards on the London Underground.

Mr. David Mitchell: Safety standards on the London underground are primarily the responsibility of London Regional Transport. LRT and London Underground Ltd. have a statutory duty to observe the provisions of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act and, where applicable, they are also required to observe my Department's published railway construction and operation requirements. The chief inspecting officer of railways provides an annual commentary on the underground's safety record in his reports on railway safety in Great Britain, copies of which are in the Library. The record has been generally satisfactory. It would be wrong for me to make any comments on matters that are currently under investigation as a result of the King's Cross fire.

74. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next expects to meet the chairman of London Regional Transport to discuss the performance of London Underground Limited.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend and I meet the chairman of London Regional Transport from time to time as and when the need arises.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has about the reduction in numbers and percentage of employees of London Underground Ltd. in the regional and telecommunications departments since 1984; what authorisations he has given to such reductions; and if any reference to such changes has been made by Her Majesty's inspectors of railways.

Mr. David Mitchell: Staffing both in aggregate and in particular departments is a matter for the boards of London Regional Transport and London Underground Ltd. The Department has no information about staffing levels in the areas referred to. Changes in those levels would not need to be referred to the Department in general or the railways inspectorate in particular.

Central London

41. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for controlling the amount of traffic entering central London.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There are no plans for direct control of the amount of traffic entering central London.

Concessionary Bus Fares

43. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now seek to introduce a national concessionary bus fare scheme for pensioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: No. It is for local authorities to decide what arrangements to make for concessionary travel in their areas, and how to help elderly people most effectively within the resources available to them.

Air Traffic (Delays)

44. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he will take to reduce delays for air travellers flying from London's airports.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on Monday 28 March at column *355*. The Government seek to discharge their functions at the London airports with the same efficiency as at other airports.

Vehicle Seat Belts

45. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies his Department has made of the safety implications of the greater use of vehicle seat belts.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Rear-seat passengers are seven times more likely than front-seat occupants to be ejected from vehicles in crashes because they are less likely to be wearing restraints. Wearing a seat belt undoubtedly cuts deaths and injury.

The Department's monitoring exercise of the effects of the 1983 introduction of compulsory wearing of seat belts and an independent assessment in 1985 by Professors Durbin and Harvey both identified at least 200 fewer deaths and 7,000 fewer serious injuries per year among front-seat occupants of cars and light vans.

All cars first registered from 1 April 1987 must also be fitted with rear-seat belts. From next October vulnerable seats in new coaches will have to be equipped similarly. Everyone is well advised to use them.

Departmental Expenditure (Safety Matters)

46. **Mr. Buckley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of all spending by his Department is used for safety improvements.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A key objective for the Department is to promote and improve safety across the transport modes. Safety-related expenditure is incurred, for example, on constructing and improving roads, on investigation of road, rail, sea and air accidents, on licensing drivers of private vehicles, buses and lorries, on inspecting vehicles of all types and approving vehicle components and systems, on regulating the bus, lorry and shipping industries and the carriage of hazardous substances, on the coast guard, on research and on publicity.

It is not practicable to specify the proportion of all spending by the Department which is used for safety improvements. Direct expenditure on safety is bound up with expenditure incurred for other reasons (for example, in the case of road construction), and safety-related expenditure varies widely in character, from physical measures such as road improvements, to research projects, to administrative costs and overheads associated with regulation, licensing, inspection and enforcement.

Manchester Airport

47. **Mr. Sackville:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he plans to meet the chairman of British Airways to discuss the future development plans for Manchester airport.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend meets the chairman of British Airways from time to time to discuss matters of mutual interest.

British Caledonian Routes

48. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding competition on air routes previously operated by British Caledonian.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We have received numerous letters on the subject. Applications from British Airlines for licences for routes previously served by British Caledonian will be considered by the Civil Aviation Authority over the next few months.

Coaches (Speed Limiters)

50. **Mr. Conway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when new coaches will be subject to speed limiters.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The regulations will apply to coaches as shown in the following table:

Date of first use	*Date from which regulation applies*
1 April 1974 to 31 March 1984	1 April 1991
1 April 1984 to 31 March 1989	1 April 1990
On or after 1 April 1989	Date of first use

Roads Budget

51. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the national roads budget was last reduced.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The national roads budget was last reduced, by £14·9 million, in the financial year 1983-84 from £738 million to £723 million. During that year, public expenditure was running ahead of planning totals and a Cabinet decision was taken to cut cash limits on all votes.

1983-84 was an exception to the steady, upward trend of provision for national roads which has resulted in real terms growth of about 30 per cent. between 1978-79 and 1987-88.

Since 1979 provision for national roads has been steadily rising as follows:

National roads public expenditure provision

£ million

Year	*Cash*	*Real terms (at 1986-87 prices)*
1978-79	377	733
1979-80	443	738
1980-81	536	754
1981-82	685	878
1982-83	739	883
1983-84	723	826
1984-85	795	869
1985-86	816	841
1986-87	893	893
1987-88	976	936

Road Accidents (Summer Time Changes)

52. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates are available to him of the predicted number of fatal and other serious road accidents which would be avoided by a changeover to British standard time or a combination of British standard time and double British summer time.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A TRRL study published in 1986 estimated, with a number of caveats, that the potential accident benefits of re-introducing British standard time — as during the 1968 to 1971 experimental period — might be as follows:

Estimated changes in national casualties during the winter

	Pedestrians		*Others (under 25)*		*Others (over 25)*		*All road users*	
	KSI	*Total*	*KSI*	*Total*	*KSI*	*Total*	*KSI*	*Total*
Per cent. reduction	3·6	2·2	1·5	0·7	1·0	0·8	1·9	1·1
Casualty reduction	300	590	180	350	100	400	580	1,340

No estimates are available on potential accident benefits from a combination of British standard time and double British summer time.

32. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department has made any studies of the cost to the economy of transport-related accidents.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department of Transport publishes annual estimates of the cost of road accidents. The total cost of road accidents in Great Britain in 1986, the latest available date, was estimated to be £3·8 billion, of which £2·8 billion is due to accidents involving personal injury. The cost of road accidents divided up for different severities of injury is as follows:

Injury	*Estimated cost* £
Fatal Accidents	1·5 billion (39 per cent.)
Serious accidents	1·1 billion (28 per cent.)
Slight accidents	0·3 billion (8 per cent.)
Damage only accidents	1·0 billion (25 per cent.)

Included in the cost of personal injury accidents are estimates of the loss of output due to death or injury (30 per cent.), medical and ambulance costs (5 per cent.), the cost of police and insurance administration (2 per cent.), property damage (11 per cent.) and an allowance for pain, grief and suffering (52 per cent.).

The Department does not assess routinely the cost of accidents on railways, in shipping or aviation.

Western Environmental Improvement Route Project

53. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has for public consultation on the western environmental improvement route project; and when any public consultation will be carried out.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We hope it will be possible to seek the public's views on the Department's proposals for the western environmental improvement route towards the end of this year.

Eurotunnel

58. **Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of Eurotunnel.

Mr. David Mitchell: I last met the chairman on 15 February.

Trunk Roads

59. **Mrs. Golding:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of trunk road schemes planned to start between April 1987 and March 1989 have had their commencement delayed.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Of the schemes listed in the 1987 White Paper "Policy for Roads in England: 1987" (Cm 125), for a start of works by March 1989, just under one-third are not now expected to achieve this. These schemes have slipped for a variety of reasons, principally delay in the statutory procedures and technical and design problems.

Highways (Agency Arrangements)

60. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given to the interim report of the Audit Commission into improving highways agency arrangements between counties and districts.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department is considering the report and discussing its implementation with the local authority associations. We welcome the emphasis on securing more businesslike agency arrangements, and look to authorities to review their arrangements in the light of the report.

Heathrow Airport (Underground Travel)

61. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last made an official journey by underground train to Heathrow airport.

Mr. David Mitchell: Neither my right hon. Friend nor I have made any recent official journeys on the underground although we have both made unofficial journeys recently.

Settle-Carlisle Line

62. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has held with local authorities regarding the Settle-Carlisle railway line.

Mr. David Mitchell: Last Wednesday, I received the terms of the local authorities' revised offer of support for the line. I am studying that, and especially the conditions they have attached to their offer.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will indicate the main implications for his Department of the feasibility study carried out by John Jarvis and Sons plc of the Settle-Carlisle railway; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The report by J. Jarvis and Sons described the potential development of tourist projects in the Settle-Carlisle corridor, rather than the future of that railway itself. The tourist potential of the area is one of the aspects I am taking into account in considering the future of the line.

Consultants

63. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many private consultants his Department has employed during the last year on studies of safety standards in transport provision.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In the calendar year 1987, the Department used nearly 50 different private consultants, industrial companies or associations on just over 70 studies concerned with safety standards in transport provision.

Litter

67. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last discussed with the chairman of British Rail his plans to remove litter and rubbish from the tracks at British Rail stations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: These are operational matters for British Rail and we have not discussed them with the chairman.

Road Projects (Transport Supplementary Grant)

68. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport why road projects with a negative net present value can qualify for transport supplementary grant.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In assessing the merits of schemes for transport supplementary grant, we take into account the extent to which they provide value for money in terms of benefits to traffic, to the community, to industry and commerce, and improvements in road safety and the environment. In certain cases, a scheme with a negative net present value may provide significant benefits which cannot be reflected in the calculation.

ScotRail

69. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the management of ScotRail to discuss rail investment.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend discusses such matters when appropriate with the chairman of the British Railways Board; it would not be appropriate to hold separate discussions with regional managements.

Light Rail Systems

70. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made in developing light rail systems.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Tyne and Wear Metro and the London docklands light railway are both in operation. Studies of further light rail proposals for London are under way and a number of authorities are proposing such systems elsewhere.

London Airports (Runway Capacity)

71. **Mr. McCrindle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will undertake a review of the adequacy of runway capacity at London airports in the 1990s.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Our 1985 White Paper "Airports Policy" (Cmnd. 9542) set out the pattern of development of airport capacity, including runway capacity, to meet London area demand into the mid-1990s. The first step in any further work is the preparation of up to date forecasts of air travel demand. The Department is preparing such forecasts, which it expects to publish towards the end of this year.

Tyneside Metro

73. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if there are any plans to extend the Tyneside Metro to Sunderland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: I understand that the Tyne and Wear passenger transport authority and executive are considering the possibility of extending the Tyneside Metro to Sunderland, but no proposals have yet been put to my Department.

Vehicle Registration

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he proposes to take on the main conclusions of the report of the consultative group on the vehicle registration system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I refer to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) on 3 February 1988 at column *622*.

Foreign Cars (Safety)

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review safety and legal problems associated with the import of foreign cars for sale which do not carry spare wheels of the same design as those fitted to the vehicle.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No. Regulations permit the use of spare wheels of different design on a temporary-use basis up to a maximum speed of 50 mph. We are not aware of safety or legal problems.

Traffic (Haringey)

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the increase in the volume of traffic by vehicle type since 1979 in the borough of Haringey.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Estimates of changes in traffic volume since 1979 are not available at a borough level.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much was spent by his Department on official hospitality in the financial year 1987-88.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department spent £84,789 in 1987-88 on the full range of official hospitality.

Ammunition (Transport by Road)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether he will introduce regulations to apply stricter controls to prevent drivers employed in the transport of ammunition by road driving under the influence of alcohol; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether he will review precautions for dealing with fire explosion, collision or other accidents involving ammunition in transit by road; and if he will make a statement;

(3) whether he will review the regulations for the transport of projectile ammunition by road; and if he will make a statement;

(4) whether he will review the regulations for the transport of explosive ammunition by road; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Later this summer we expect to make the Road Traffic (Carriage of Explosives) Regulations, which will provide up-to-date and co-ordinated controls covering all aspects of the carriage of explosives by road including the transport of ammunition. They will deal with such matters as the marking of vehicles, training and instruction, and the procedures to follow in the event of an accident. They will reaffirm the existing prohibition on people under the influence of alcohol being in or in attendance on a vehicle carrying explosives.

Transport in London (Attacks)

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many attacks there have been on *(a)* members of the public where transport staff have been involved in assisting those attacked and *(b)* members of the public unassisted by staff on (i) London buses, (ii) London Underground and (iii) British Rail in the London area in the last 12 months; what were the comparable figures five and 10 years ago; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: This information is not available.

Road Programme

Mr. Carttiss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he proposes to add any further schemes to the road programme.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The last major review of our road programme, which we announced last April, added 82 new schemes to it. On 7 March, as part of the Government's inner cities initiative, we announced further schemes with an estimated construction cost of £109 million. We have now decided to add seven more schemes, expected to cost about £41 million, as follows:

Schemes added to the road programme

	Region	*Estimated works cost £ million*
All-purpose trunk roads		
1. A11 Roudham Heath to Attleborough Improvement	ERO	9·9
2. A12 Lowestoft Second Harbour Crossing	ERO	10·4
3. A31 Ashley Heath to Ringwood Improvement	SWRO	2·5
4. A46 Pennsylvania to M4 Tormarton Improvement	SWRO	4·0
5. A6 Rothwell and Desborough Bypass	EMRO	5·1
6. A23 Wadden Marsh Bridge	LRO	[1]4·0
Motorway		
7. M— Blackburn Southern Bypass: Extension to Bamber Bridge Bypass[2]	NWRO	5·0
		40·9

Note:
[1] Including private sector contribution of £3 million.
[2] Motorway number to be decided.

Bus Services

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce legislation to amend the present statutory provision which results in bus companies being unable to cross-subsidise their more profitable runs with the lossmakers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: There is no statutory provision preventing a bus operator from cross-subsidising unprofitable services with profitable ones. But the Government believes that it is wrong to restrict

competition in order to facilitate cross-subsidisation. It is better for socially necessary but uneconomic services to be supported openly by local authority subsidy.

Under the Transport Act 1985 local authorities must go out to competitive tender for any socially necessary services which operators are unwilling to provide on a commercial basis. This ensures value for money and the Government have no plans for amending these provisions.

Dangerous Materials (Shipping)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what regulations govern the transport of dangerous materials by merchant shipping; and whether such dangerous materials include tins of paint.

Mr. David Mitchell: The transport of packaged dangerous goods materials by merchant shipping is governed by the Merchant Shipping (Dangerous Goods) Regulations 1981 (SI 1981 No. 1747) as amended by the Merchant Shipping (Dangerous Goods) (Amendment) Regulations 1986 (SI 1986 No. 1069). Tins of paint are defined as dangerous goods when the paint itself is flammable and has a flashpoint of 61 °C or below.

PTAs (Funding)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the representations he has received regarding the proposed changes in the funding of passenger transport authorities;

(2) if he will list the representations he has received in favour of the proposed changes in the funding of passenger transport authorities;

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the responses he has received to his letter, headed "Proposed changes in financing of passenger transport authorities";

(2) if he will make available in the Library copies of all the responses received to his letter, headed "Proposed changes in the financing of passenger transport authorities".

Mr. David Mitchell: Those who made the 45 written responses to the discussion paper are listed as follows. Almost all were opposed. Thirteen hon. Members have also written to me about it. I have discussed the proposal with representatives of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and hon. Members representing constituencies in Greater Manchester.

Copies of all the written responses received up to 30 March were placed in the Libraries of both Houses on that day, as I announced in my reply of that date to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King). I am today placing copies of subsequent responses in the Libraries of both Houses.

Responses received up to 30 March 1988
City of Birmingham
Bolton Metropolitan Borough
City of Bradford Metropolitan Council
Bus and Coach Council
Metropolitan Borough of Bury
City of Coventry
Greater Manchester Buses Ltd.[1]
Greater Manchester PTA
Greater Manchester PTE
Greater Manchester Transport Action Group
Greater Manchester Transport Consultative Committee
Knowsley Borough Council
Manchester City Council
Merseyside PTA
North Manchester Pensioners' Association
National and Local Government Officers Association
City of Newcastle Upon Tyne (1)
Oldham Metropolitan Borough
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Metropolitan Borough of St. Helens
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Borough of Sunderland
Trafford and South Manchester Pensioners' Association
Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
Transport 2000 –Derbyshire and Peak District Group
North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council
Borough of South Tyneside
South Yorkshire PTA
South Yorkshire PTE
Tyne and Wear PTA
Tyne and Wear PTE
Tyne and Wear PTE Group
City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
West Midlands PTA
West Midlands PTE
West Yorkshire PTA
West Yorkshire PTE
Wharfdale Rail Users' Group

Responses received after 30 March
Crosville Motor Services Ltd.[1]
Finglands South Manchester Coachways Ltd.[1]
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council
Metropolitan Borough of Stockport
City of Newcastle Upon Tyne (2)
Reddish Association of Retired People

[1] Forwarded by Greater Manchester PTE

Level Crossing (Representations)

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether in view of the mislaying of the letter to him dated 15 March sent by the chief executive officer of the Rutland district council objecting to the British Railways (Luffenham) Level Crossing Order he will extend the consultation period to allow for these representations by the council to be properly considered by his Department.

Mr. David Mitchell: While I have still not received a letter from Rutland district council making representations about the Luffenham Level Crossing Order, a copy of the letter has now been obtained from my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham). The representations contained in the letter will be given full consideration if or when the British Railways Board officially applies for the order to be made.

Freightliners Ltd.

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the cost per annum of repairing and maintaining British Rail's subsidiary, Freightliners Ltd's fleet of rail wagons; what steps are being taken to reduce this cost; and if consideration has been given to renting wagons from the private sector;

(2) what guidelines his Department has laid down for British Rail and its subsidiary Freightliners Ltd., relating to the repair and maintenance of container wagons by British Rail Engineering Ltd., in the current year and whether the option of renting container wagons from the private sector has been considered;

(3) if he will make a statement on his policy towards British Rail's proposals for investment in its subsidary Freightliners Ltd.;

(4) when he expects to complete his Department's review into British Rail's total demand for container wagons in the light of probable need for additional wagons to run through the Channel tunnel in 1993.

Mr. David Mitchell: The comprehensive objectives set by the then Secretary of State in 1986 on 21 October 1986 at columns 772-74, require BR's non-supported businesses, including Freightliners, to continue to plan on the basis of a required rate of return of 5 per cent. on its programme of new investment. BR is also asked to take vigorous measures to broaden the participation of the private sector in the provision of services to the railway.

Within this framework, it is for BR to assess the numbers and types of wagons needed, taking account of forecast freight movements by rail through the Channel tunnel, and how they should be sourced, repaired and maintained.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 19 April 1988

SOCIAL SERVICES

Health Authorities (Armed Forces Casualties)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will place in the Library a copy of his Department's guidance to health authorities on reception arrangements for armed forces casualties who will be returned to the United Kingdom for treatment in the event of future war in Europe.

Mrs. Currie: No.

Mentally Handicapped People

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to his answers to the hon. Member for Monklands, West of 15 March, *Official Report*, columns *553-54*, what steps he has taken to encourage local authorities to collect data on *(a)* the discharge and subsequent care of people from long-stay mental illness and mental handicap institutions, *(b)* the number of carers in their area, *(c)* the provision of home help support, district nursing services, social work support, or other services to carers and *(d)* the number of households with a mentally handicapped member, and the numbers receiving sitting services, respite care or holiday relief schemes.

Mrs. Currie: Local authorities are responsible for deciding what information they require for management of services provided for mentally ill and mentally handicapped people in their areas. The need for central collection of information from local authorities is reviewed periodically, for example a new return on residential accommodation was introduced in 1987.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the number of registered *(a)* mentally ill and *(b)* mentally handicapped patients in the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale health authority area for each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mrs. Currie: The numbers of in-patients resident at 31 December in National Health Service mental illness and mental handicap hospitals and units managed by this district health authority are given in the table. The people concerned are not registered and may not have been resident in the area of the health authority before their admission as patients. I regret that the figures for 1987 are not yet available.

Number of in-patients resident in mental health hospitals and units in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale heath authority at 31 December

Year	Mental-illness	Mental-handicap
1979	177	1,206
1980	171	1,161
1981	165	1,126
1982	194	1,090
1983	223	1,054
1984	214	1,009
1985	203	940
1986	214	871

Abortions

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, what information he has as to the medical circumstances which created the need for abortions to be performed in emergency to save the life of the mother in those 126 such cases which have arisen since 1967; and if he will indicate the number of times each of those conditions has been a relevant factor.

Mr. Newton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Notifications of abortions performed in emergency in order to save the life of the pregnant woman, carried out under the Abortion Act 1967, by medical condition stated. England and Wales, April 1968-September 1987 (provisional)

Condition	Number
Placenta praevia and other antepartum haemorrhage	9
Eclampsia	16
Pre-eclampsia	30
Other hypertension	6
Hyperemesis gravidarum	6
Ectopic pregnancy	4
Other obstetric causes	8
Infectious diseases	4
Neoplasms	11
Mental disorders	6
Circulatory disorders	11
Other conditions	15
Total	126

World Health Organisation

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, what contribution the United Kingdom has made in each of the last five years to World Health Organisation efforts to assess the efficiency of different methods of treatment for drug misusers.

Mrs. Currie: Assessment of the efficiency of different methods of treatment for drug misusers is part of the World Health Organisation programme on prevention and control of alcohol and drug abuse. This is one of the programmes paid for from the organisation's regular budget, of which the United Kingdom's assessed contribution represents 4·77 per cent. of the whole. Within the programme, officials of the United Kingdom Health Departments have contributed to publications and taken part in expert working groups.

NHS (Ancillary Staff)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the latest figures available for the number of ancillary staff employed in the National Health Service, by job title, under the terms and conditions of the Ancillary Staffs Whitley council agreements.

Mr. Newton: Provisional figures show that 115,000 whole-time equivalent ancillary staff were employed in the NHS in England at 30 September 1987. Since the

introduction of a revised grading structure in 1986, the agreements of the Ancillary Staffs Whitley council no longer provide for job titles.

NHS Review

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if there is a deadline for the submission of evidence for the National Health Service review; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if the findings of the National Health Service review will be published.

Mr. Moore: I should welcome early submission of evidence for the NHS review, although there is no formal deadline. The outcome of the review will be announced to the House, but no decision has yet been taken on the nature of supporting documentation.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many individuals are paid industrial disablement pension; and how many will have this disregarded for the purpose of calculating housing benefit *(a)* in Nottingham, North *(b)* in Nottingham and *(c)* in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Scott: Industrial disablement pension was in payment to about 184,000 people in the United Kingdom in April 1987, the latest date for which information is available. From April 1988, industrial disablement pension is not disregarded for the purpose of calculating housing benefit. Prior to April 1988 a statutory disregard of £4 applied. I regret that the other information requested is not available.

Firemen

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to enable unemployed retained firemen to receive both social security benefits and moneys from incidental and drill fees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Payments received by retained firemen in respect of any duties performed by them have no effect on their entitlement to unemployment benefit. Payments they receive in respect of drills, retainers, turn-out and stand-by are treated as earnings for income support purposes but are automatically subject to the higher (£15) disregard. The long-service gratuity is treated as capital. There are no plans to change these provisions.

Single Payments

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the number and cost of single payments made by his Department's Corby office in each year since 1983.

Mr. Portillo: In the year April 1983 to April 1984, 4,601 single payments were made by the Department's Corby office. The total monetary value was £214,403. The information requested for the years April 1984 to April 1987, which is the latest complete data available, has been placed in the Library.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many persons were receiving supplementary benefit from the Corby local office on 1 April 1983, 1 April 1984, 1 April 1985, 1 April 1986, 1 April 1987 and 1 April 1988.

Mr. Portillo: This information is not available in the precise form requested.

The number of persons receiving supplementary benefit from the Corby local office in May of each year requested is:

	Persons
10 May 1983	6,218
8 May 1984	6,493
7 May 1985	6,487
6 May 1986	6,395
5 May 1987	5,773

Figures for 1988 are not available.
Source: 100 per cent. count of cases in action.

Cancer Screening

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will indicate the budget provision per health authority on a per capita basis for cervical and breast cancer screening.

Mrs. Currie: Health authorities do not have separate budget allocations for cervical cancer screening. It has been estimated that the average cost of taking and examining a cervical smear is about £10. The allocation given to each regional health authority for the continuing revenue cost of the new breast cancer screening services is based on the financial estimates in the Forrest report and is about £14 per woman screened by mammography including, where necessary, the cost of assessment and diagnosis. Between 1987-88 and 1989-90, on current plans, nearly £55 million will have been provided to set up and run the breast cancer screening service in England.

Family Practitioner Committees

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what representations he has received regarding manning levels for family practitioner committees; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what the staffing levels of family practitioner committees *(a)* were in 1983, *(b)* are now and *(c)* are forecast to be in 1991.

Mr. Newton: Representations have been received from time to time about resources made available to family practitioner committees for administrative expenditure, about three-quarters of which represents staff salaries. The allocations made for the current year, however, include an overall increase of about 5·5 per cent. in real terms.

The number of staff employed by family practitioner committees fell from 4,670 (whole-time equivalent) to 4,600 between 30 September 1983 and 30 September 1986, the latest date for which figures are available. This reduction includes some staff savings achieved as part of the programme of computerisation of patient registration data which was completed on 31 March 1988; further reductions on this account will be reflected in the figures for 1987 and 1988, when these become available.

No forecasts have been made of future manning levels, but the White Paper on "Promoting Better Health" (Cm. 249), which was published last November, envisages an increased role for FPCs.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether his Department has now received from all family practitioner committees their most recent annual programme and action plan; and what action he proposes to take.

Mr. Newton: All but one family practitioner committee in England have submitted their current annual programmes during the last six months. Each programme is discussed with the FPC with a view to establishing an agreed action plan for which the committee will be held accountable.

Griffiths Report

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the answer of 12 April, at which date the period for taking account of views on the Griffiths report will close; and how long after that the Government will issue their own response to the report.

Mr. Newton: There is no formal closing date for the submission of views on Sir Roy Griffiths' report. We intend to bring forward our own proposals as soon as we have been able to give full consideration to the important issues involved.

Hospital Statistics (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he anticipates bed availability and occupancy figures for Nottingham district health authority for 1987-88 will become available centrally.

Mrs. Currie: We expect to have this information available centrally by the end of August.

Drugs (Adverse Reactions)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the reply to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South, *Official Report*, 29 March, column *445*, what is his policy regarding the providing of information to interested Members when investigations into an alleged failure by a pharmaceutical company to report adverse reactions show that there has been a breach of the statutory procedures.

Mr. Newton: Evidence of cases of apparent failure to report adverse reactions is very rare. Whether or not the public interest would best be served by making the results of investigations into such matters public has to be considered on a case by case basis.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the reply to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South, *Official Report*, 29 March, column *445*, on what date each of the investigations began into alleged failures to report adverse reactions by two pharmaceutical companies; and by when each is expected to be concluded.

Mr. Newton: I refer the right hon. Member to my reply to him on 26 February 1988, at column *364*. These investigations are complex and I am unable to estimate when they will be completed.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the reply to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South, *Official Report*, 29 March, column *445*, how investigations are carried out by his Department into alleged failures by pharmaceutical companies to report adverse reactions; how many of his officials are normally involved; if the original data of the company is inspected; and who decides whether or not the allegations are substantiated, on the appropriate penalty and on the publicity that should be given to the findings.

Mr. Newton: I refer the right hon. Member to my replies to him on 27 November 1987, at columns *354-55* and on 18 December 1987, at column *931*. The number and type of officials involved depends on the needs of the case. The company may be asked to submit original data to the Department. The answer to the other questions would depend on the circumstances of the case and are not the subject of any specific departmental rules or guidance.

Personal Savings

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what estimate he has of the number of people who have savings of *(a)* £3,000 or more and *(b)* £6,000 or more for each parliamentary constituency;

(2) what estimate he has of the number of people who have savings of *(a)* £3,000 or over and *(b)* £6,000 or over for each DHSS office;

(3) what estimate he has of the number of people of pensionable age who have savings of *(a)* £3,000 or more and *(b)* £6,000 or more living in each of Scotland, England and Wales;

(4) what estimate he has of the number of people who have savings of *(a)* £3,000 or more and *(b)* £6,000 or more living in each of Scotland, England and Wales.

Mr. Portillo: I regret that this information is not available.

Income Support

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people would benefit if the capital limits on social security benefits were rasied to £10,000.

Mr. Portillo: The only social security benefits affected by the amount of capital a person has are income support, housing benefit and family credit. The numbers (in thousands) of people who would become entitled to those benefits if the capital cut-off limit were raised to £10,000 are:

	Persons (thousands)
Income Support	6·0
Family Credit:	4·1
Housing Benefit:	152·0

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his policy with regard to supplementary benefit recipients being asked for photostat copies of bank and savings accounts before the new income support grant is granted, with particular reference to those cases where such information is already on record; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: During the exercise to convert supplementary benefit payments to income support it was necessary

to ensure that up-to-date information was available on all aspects of a claim. Staff are instructed to ask to see statements, bank books, and so on, but not photocopies of original documents.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will review the contents of those parts of the claim forms for income support and family credit which require claimants to declare capital of more than £2,500 rather than £3,000 and which require the divulging of personal information.

Mr. Portillo: Income support and family credit claimants are asked to provide details when savings are more than £2,500. This is below the £3,000 capital limit in case some assets have to be valued at more than their nominal face value (for example shares or national savings certificates).

Mrs. Jane Tipping

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he will answer the letter from the hon. Member for Birkenhead written to him on 22 February regarding the case of Mrs. Jane Tipping.

Mr. Portillo: I wrote to the hon. Member yesterday.

Medical Equipment

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will place in the Library the report on the maintenance of medical equipment compiled by Mr. David Fernandez.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 16 November 1987]:* The report has now been placed in the Library.

Leeds Western Health Authority (Chairman)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will be taking steps to consult local organisations before making an appointment to the vacant chairmanship of Leeds western health authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* We are not required to consult anyone in appointing health authority chairmen. However, we take full account of any nominations we may receive from local or other sources.

Census (Languages)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he hopes to be able to announce the format of 1991 census questions on *(a)* Scots Gaelic speakers in Scotland, *(b)* Irish Gaelic speakers in Northern Ireland, *(c)* Welsh speakers in Wales, *(d)* speakers of indigenous languages other than English in England and *(e)* speakers of non-indigenous languages in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* No decisions have yet been taken on the content of the 1991 census. Proposals for Great Britain will be published as a White Paper later this year. It is planned to test the proposed questionnaire in early 1989 and thereafter to lay before Parliament a draft Order in Council prescribing the content of the census. The final format of the 1991 census questions will be included in the census regulations which are expected to be laid before Parliament in 1990.

The 1991 census for Northern Ireland will be taken under separate legislation. This is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Hampstead and Haringey DHAs

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will place in the Library all documents regarding the proposed merger of Hampstead and Haringey district health authorities; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is the financial basis of the proposed merger between the Hampstead and Haringey district health authorities; and what other criteria are involved;

(3) what discussions he has had regarding the possible merger of Hampstead and Haringey district health authorities; and with whom.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* I understand that North East Thames regional health authority is examining, with the two district health authorities concerned, the possibility of a merger between Hampstead and Haringey health authorities. Consideration of this matter is at an early stage and the hon. Member may wish to write to the chairman of the regional health authority for further information about any proposals which may be made. If, following public consultation, the regional health authority decides to proceed with a proposal for the merger of the two health authorities, such a proposal will need to be approved by Ministers. As part of the approval process we would expect to enter into discussions with a wide range of interested parties prior to any final decision.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the decision to merge the Hampstead and Haringey district health authorities will affect in any way the previous decision to retain the regional cancer screening unit at the North Middlesex hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* No decision has been taken to merge the Hampstead and Haringey health authorities. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has also stated that we are not prepared to agree to the closure of the radiotherapy unit at the North Middlesex hospital.

District Health Authorities (Land Holdings)

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North on 26 November 1987, *Official Report*, columns *319-21*, if he will list in league order, with the highest at the top, by acreage of land held, district health authority areas within the National Health Service in England, showing the valuation in each case *(a)* before the recent revaluation and *(b)* at the present valuation as decided by the district valuer.

Mrs. Currie *[pursuant to her reply, 18 February 1988, c. 694]:* The preliminary aggregation of the 1987 returns from district valuers has now been completed. The open market value of the NHS estate of approximately 44,000 acres was about £6·8 billion at 1987 prices. This figure is subject to revision as the returns are analysed in detail. A breakdown of the respective 1985 and 1987 valuations by district health authority in a league order by site areas has been placed in the Library.

Nurses

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the number of nurses per thousand population in each of the regional health authorities.

Mr. Newton: The number of nursing and midwifery staff per thousand population employed in each regional health authority is given in the table:

NHS nursing and midwifery staff[1] in post per thousand population 1986

Regional health authority	*Ratio*
Northern	8·9
Yorkshire	8·4
Trent	8·0
East Anglian	7·8
North West Thames	8·2
North East Thames	9·1
South East Thames	8·4
South West Thames	8·2
Wessex	8·0
Oxford	6·8
South Western	8·5
West Midlands	8·2
Mersey	9·2
North Western	9·5
London postgraduate special health authority	•
England[2]	8·5

Source: DHSS annual census of NHS non-medical manpower; Office of Population Censuses and Surveys mid-year estimates.

[1] Includes agency nursing and midwifery staff. Ratios calculated on unrounded figures. Staff in post relate to 30 September 1986; population figures are mid-year estimates for 1986.

[2] Includes staff employed by London postgraduate special health authorities.

• Ratio calculation not possible — separate population figure does not exist for special health authorities.

ENERGY

Electricity Industry

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what recent discussions he has had with the trade unions regarding privatisation of the electricity industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friend and I met representatives of the Electricity Supply Trades Union Council on 13 April and we will continue to hold regular meetings to discuss matters of common interest.

Wind Farms

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what role his Department is playing in the study and development of wind farms in both the private and public sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My Department is involved in a collaborative programme with the Central Electricity Generating Board which will include evaluating the public acceptability of wind farms. The programme is expected to cost some £30 million and is expected to involve the establishment of three wind farms in England and Wales and, I hope, at least one in Scotland.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the number of full-time employees in the coal industry for *(a)* Yorkshire and *(b)* Don Valley constituency; and what proportion of the number employed eight years ago this represents.

Mr. Michael Spicer: This is a matter for the British Coal Corporation, and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Uranium

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if any uranium import contracts or uranium processing contracts have been signed or carried out since 1979 between BNFL plc. or BNFL and NUFCOR of South Africa which have required *(a)* bilateral, *(b)* International Atomic Energy Agency and *(c)* Euratom safeguards provisions.

Mr. Michael Spicer *[holding answer 25 March 1988]:* British Nuclear Fuels plc has a long-standing agreement with the Nuclear Fuels Corporation of South Africa, which was renewed in 1985, to process uranium ore concentrate. All civil uranium imported into the United Kingdom for processing and subsequent re-export is under safeguards.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mr. Freddie Andrews

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Attorney-General (1) if he will inquire into the handling of the affairs of Freddie Andrews by the Official Solicitor; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will obtain from the Official Solicitor details of all transactions carried out on behalf of Freddie Andrews listing *(a)* the properties disposed of, *(b)* the date of sale, *(c)* the purchaser, *(d)* the value of property sold and *(e)* where the sums realised have been deposited; and if he will request the High Court to make available the above information to the Andrews family.

The Attorney-General: No. I refer the hon. Member to my earlier replies to him about this case on 25 February 1988, at columns *257-58*.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Namibia

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what status the British Government accord to the United Nations Council for Namibia.

Mrs. Chalker: We do not recognise the claim of the United Nations Council for Namibia to be the administering authority for the territory. The United Nations General Assembly acted beyond its competence under the charter in establishing such a body.

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he was represented at the United Nations Council for Namibia conference *(a)* in Instanbul on 21 March and *(b)* on past occasions; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We have not been represented at conferences of the United Nations Council for Namibia, which we do not recognise.

News Conference, Jordan

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's ambassador in Amman has reported to him on the reasons advanced by the Jordanian Government for preventing the broadcast of the recent news conference held by the United States Secretary of State, as reported by Voice of Palestine radio on 10 April; and whether Her Majesty's Government have expressed any concern to the Jordanian Government about this.

Mr. Mellor: We have not raised this matter with the Jordanians.

North Atlantic Assembly (Parliamentary Delegation)

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes have been made in the composition of the United Kingdom parliamentary delegation to the North Atlantic Assembly.

Mr. Mellor: My noble Friend the Lord Colnbrook has replaced the late Earl de la Warr as a member of the delegation.

PRIME MINISTER

London Docklands Development Corporation

Q28. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Prime Minister when she next expects to meet the chairman of the London Docklands Development Corporation, in order to discuss the finances of the corporation.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

EC (Government's Achievements)

Mr. Patnick: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list the achievements of Her Majesty's Government since 1979 with regard to the European Community.

The Prime Minister: We have concentrated on making European Community policies cost-effective, relevant and equitable. At Fontainebleau in 1984 we agreed that the United Kingdom should pay only its fair share of the EC budget. That agreement has already saved the taxpayer £3 billion. In our presidency in 1986, and at the Brussels European Council this February, we secured major reforms of the common agricultural policy, including a binding ceiling on agricultural spending and automatic cost-cutting regimes for all commodities.

We have made it the Community's top priority to complete the single European market for goods and services by 1992 so as to give our industry improved access to important markets in Europe and a better base from which to compete in world markets. We have championed measures to help our citizens such as less regulation, cheaper air fares and higher product safety standards.

We supported the entry of Greece, Spain and Portugal into the Community, thereby underpinning their democracy and strengthening NATO. At British initiative the EC member states have agreed an internationally binding basis for closer co-operation in foreign policy. We have supported moves to liberalise the international trading system in the Uruguay round of GATT negotiations, which was launched in 1986 under the United Kingdom presidency.

By modernising our own economy we have been able to argue from strength for up-to-date policies for the Community as a whole. We have taken Britain from the sidelines to the mainstream of Europe.

Child Care

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Prime Minister what child care provision is provided by the Cabinet Office for the pre-school aged children of Cabinet Office employees; what child care provision, for school holiday and/or after-school care, is provided for employees' children aged five and over; what plans there are for increasing provision in the next five years; and how these are to be funded.

The Prime Minister: At present no child care provision is provided by the Cabinet Office for employees' children. There are no plans to introduce such facilities in the next five years.

Government Employees

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Prime Minister how many employees of central Government are employed in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* each of the English regions, *(d)* Northern Ireland and *(e)* elsewhere; and what proportion of the total they represent.

The Prime Minister: Geographical analyses of all employees of central Government (including the National Health Service, Northern Ireland Government and other bodies) are not available centrally. Information for the Civil Service is as follows:

Staff in post at 1 April 1987

Area	*Number (Thousands)*	*Percentage*
Wales	32·4	5·4
Scotland	62·6	10·5
South east	225·7	37·8
South west	68·9	11·5
West Midlands	35·3	5·9
North west	52·9	8·8
Northern	33·6	5·6
Yorkshire and Humberside	34·6	5·8
East Midlands	23·0	3·8
East Anglia	15·2	2·5
Northern Ireland	5·0	0·8
Elsewhere	8·7	1·5
All areas	597·8	100·0

Engagements

Mr. Jack: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 19 April.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 19 April.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 19 April.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 19 April.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 19 April.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 19 April.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 19 April.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 19 April.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 19 April.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

WALES

Regional Development Grant

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the *(a)* shortest time, *(b)* longest time, *(c)* median time and *(d)* arithmetic mean time that it took to process straightforward regional development grant applications processed in 1987.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* There is no generally accepted definition of a straightforward regional development grant application. Of the total applications dealt with by my Department during 1987, 90 per cent. were processed within four months of receipt. Of these 90 per cent. of cases: *(a)* the shortest processing time was one day, *(b)* the longest time was 17 weeks; *(c)* the median time was eight weeks and *(d)* the arithmetic mean time was eight weeks. The longer processing time incurred under *(b)* reflected the need to secure additional supporting information from applicants and to consider policy issues raised by particular applications.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of regional development grant applications under consideration by his Department on 31 March.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* 1,935 regional development grant applications are under consideration following the ending of the scheme. I am delighted that so many firms have come forward with applications following my invitation to apply for regional development grants before they were phased out. This total of applications received between January and March compares with only 520 in the same period last year. I am delighted that the manner in which the Government have phased out the existing RDG grant in order to make way for increased expenditure by the WDA and on regional selective assistance has resulted in this massive injection of investment into the Welsh economy.

Child Care

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what child care provision his Department provides for pre-school age children of the Department's employees; what child care provision, for school holiday and/or after-school care, is provided for employees' children age five and over; what plans there are for increasing provision in the next five years; and how these are to be funded.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* None, but a study is under way to examine the interest in and feasibility of a day care facility for children of Welsh Office staff.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Home Ales, Nottingham

Mr. Allen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will meet the chairman of Scottish and Newcastle Breweries to discuss the situation of the tenants of Home Ales in Nottingham; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The chairman of Scottish and Newcastle Breweries has not requested a meeting.

I understand that the brewery is in negotiation with its tenants over the terms of their tenancy contracts. This is a commercial matter on which it would not be appropriate for me to comment.

Bovine Somatrophin

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the purpose, with particular reference to *(a)* safety and *(b)* efficacy of the secret trials currently being undertaken the use of bovine somatrophin in milk production.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 15 April 1988]:* The trials which are being conducted by pharmaceutical companies in the United Kingdom and other countries are to provide information on the use of the product under field conditions. Before any such trial involving a medicinal product can take place in the United Kingdom it must be authorised by means of an animal test certificate (ATC) issued under the Medicines Act 1968. Such certificates are issued only when the safety of the product to be used in the trial has been satisfactorily demonstrated.

Section 118 of the Medicines Act prohibits the disclosure of any information supplied to the licensing authority as part of an application. It is therefore not possible to give details about the trials.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Inner London (Further Education)

11. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the future provision of post-16 education in inner London.

Mrs. Rumbold: Under the Government's proposals, each inner London council will be responsible for securing the provision of post-16 education in its area. This will be one of the subjects the boroughs will be required to cover in their development plans.

University Funding

12. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from the Universities of Dundee and Aberdeen concerning university funding.

Mr. Jackson: While we have received a number of representations, including some from hon. Members,

about the position of Aberdeen and Dundee, we have had no recent approaches from the universities themselves. The two universities are in continuing discussion with the University Grants Committee about planning for the future.

37. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to meet the University Grants Committee to discuss the funding of Scottish universities; and if he will make a statement.

41. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to meet the University Grants Committee to discuss future funding of Scottish universities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave on 19 January, at column *675*, to the hon. Members for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) and for Kirkaldy (Dr. Moonie).

Workers Educational Association

13. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to meet the Workers Educational Association to discuss future funding; and if he will make a statement.

46. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to meet representatives of the Workers Educational Association to discuss future funding; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans to meet the Workers Educational Association. Officials from the Department are currently discussing the future of the association with its representatives.

Education Tests (Departmental Correspondence)

14. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from persons or organisations who have submitted information in confidence to his Department about the implications for the preservation of its confidentiality of the recent unauthorised disclosure of a letter from Mr. Paul Gray in the Prime Minister's Office to Mr. Tom Jeffrey in his Office, concerning education tests; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: None.

Teachers

16. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement about proposed future machinery for the determination of pay and conditions for teachers.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Government are considering responses to the Green Paper "Teachers' Pay and Conditions: A Consultative Document".

32. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to meet the teachers unions to discuss future arrangements for the determination of payment conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Green Paper "Teachers' Pay and Conditions: A Consultative Document" set out the Government's proposals for future arrangements for determining school teachers' pay and conditions. Several organisations have asked to see my right hon. Friend about future machinery and such meetings will take place in the next few months.

Solvent Abuse

17. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will issue a circular to local authorities about the control of solvent abuse by pupils in secondary schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Bob Dunn: The Department issued a safety bulletin to all local education authorities in 1984, providing advice about solvent misuse. Guidance specifically on health education concerning solvent misuse was also provided in Her Majesty's inspectorate document "Health Education from 5 to 16", issued to all schools in 1986. My right hon. Friend has no plans to issue further advice.

Home Tutors

18. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the pay and conditions of home tutors.

Mrs. Rumbold: I understand the concern of my hon. Friend about the pay and conditions of home tutors in Cheshire. The Department is in touch with the local education authority about the position.

School Closures

19. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many applications for school closures are currently being considered by his Department; and what is the average length of time they have been awaiting decisions.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend is currently considering 84 proposals to cease to maintain schools. The average length of time since the date of publication of these proposals is 5·4 months; this includes the period of two months allowed for the receipt of objections and the further month for the local education authority to comment on these.

Educational Maintenance Allowances

20. **Mr. Stott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to meet the Association of County Councils to discuss future provision of educational maintenance allowances for 16 and 17-year-olds.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to meet with the Association of Metropolitan Authorities to discuss future provisions of education maintenance allowances for 16 and 17-year-olds.

Mr. Dunn: No.

Nursery Nurses

21. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has held any recent discussions with the Nursery Nurses Examination Board about career structure for nursery nurses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: No. My right hon. Friend has no powers governing the career structure of nursery nurses. The career development of nursery nurses working in the public sector is the responsibility of their local government employers, but less than one third of those qualifying annually are initially employed in this way.

Further and Higher Education

22. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement concerning the future organisation and funding of higher and further education in inner London.

Mr. Jackson: The Government's intention is that from April 1989 the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC) will have power to fund most non-university higher education in inner London, and that from April 1990 the responsibility for the provision of further education in inner London, and such non-university higher education as is not funded by the PCFC, will transfer from the Inner London education authority to the inner London councils.

Student Finance

23. **Mrs. Wise:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a further statement on the progress of his review on student finance.

Mr. Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr).

GCSE

24. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Eduation and Science what representations he has received on Her Majesty's inspectorate's report on the introduction of the general certificate of secondary education; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which my right hon. Friend gave earlier to the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam).

29. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on the effectiveness of funding to prepare pupils for the new general certificate of secondary education examinations.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has received various representations from teachers, school governors and others about funding for the GCSE. These, and the recently published HMI interim report on the GCSE, indicate that concern about the availability of resources in schools for the new examinations has generally diminished. The Government have allowed for expenditure of over £100 million in each of the years 1987-88 and 1988-89 for the introduction of the GCSE, including specific grant for books and equipment and for the in-service training of teachers. It is for local education authorities and schools to ensure that the funds are spent where they are most needed.

16-year-olds

25. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to increase the staying-on rate at the age of 16; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allen McKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to increase the staying-on rate at the age of 16 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: As stated in the 1988 public expenditure White Paper, the Government wish to encourage greater participation in post-16 education and training. My right hon. Friend aims to raise the level of attainment of young people and to encourage a more positive attitude to continuing education and training. He considers that the examination reforms and new forms of provision already introduced, together with the curriculum and other school reforms proposed in the Education Reform Bill, will help to achieve this objective.

Education Reform

26. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what further consideration he has given to the advice and information which he will provide to the parents and governors of schools who are considering opting for grant maintained status.

Mr. Dunn: Once the Education Reform Bill has been enacted, my right hon. Friend intends to publish guidance for all interested parties on the proposals for grant-maintained schools. This will include information for parents and governors contemplating grant-maintained status for their school.

33. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what consultations he has had with representatives of ethnic minority groups about the Education Reform Bill; and, in particular, the provisions to abolish the Inner London education authority.

Mr. Dunn: Copies of all the consultation documents on the proposed provisions of the Education Reform Bill were sent to a wide range of organisations known to have an interest in education, and further copies were freely available from the Department of Education and Science. Comments were received from a substantial number of organisations representing ethnic minority groups, in response to the various documents, and copies of these responses have been placed in the Library of the House.

43. **Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to publish in full the latest version of his proposed national curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) earlier today.

44. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has received any representations concerning the admissions procedure to grant maintained schools which may be established after the enactment of the Education Reform Bill.

Mr. Dunn: A significant number of the representations which my right hon. Friend received in response to the

consultation document on grant-maintained schools showed an interest in the admissions arrangements which such schools would adopt.

National Association of Head Teachers

27. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to meet the leadership of the National Association of Head Teachers; and what matters he intends to discuss with it.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has accepted an invitation to address the annual conference of the National Association of Head Teachers on 3 June.

LINK Programme

28. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will seek additional funding for the expansion of the LINK programme in 1989-90.

Mr. Jackson: Funding in 1989-90 for LINK programmes and for the science base generally will be subject to review in this year's public expenditure survey.

Social Sciences

30. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent examination he has made of the adequacy of funding of social sciences in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jackson: The social sciences are mostly funded through the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the recurrent grant distributed to the universities by the University Grants Committee. The Advisory Board for the Research Councils each year considers the research proposals and funding needs of the ESRC as part of the preparation of advice on the allocation of the science budget. In allocating funds to universities the UGC takes into account planned student numbers in the social sciences, as in other subjects. The committee is currently reviewing national provision for sociology and social policy as part of its programme of subject reviews. Given these arrangements, my right hon. Friend has not thought it necessary to make any additional examination of the funding of the social sciences.

Advisory Council on Science and Technology

31. **Dr. Bray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last attended a meeting of the Advisory Council on Science and Technology.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend had an informal meeting with members of the council on 7 December 1987.

Nursery Education

34. **Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on his policy for nursery and pre-five school education, in the light of the report by Professor Peter Mortimore, "School Matters", a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has so far seen only press accounts of this report, which indicate that it did not include any study of under-fives education. But my hon. Friend no doubt has in mind the broad conclusion reflected in its title. The Government accept that children can benefit from pre-school experience but believe they are being realistic in their policy of maintaining both the current discretionary arrangements and level funding of this sector in real terms.

47. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to increase the level of nursery education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) on 19 January at column *805*.

48. **Mr. Sedgemore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received urging him to take steps to ensure that the provision of nursery education in inner London is maintained following abolition of the Inner London education authority.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has received about 60 representations on this matter.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what is the average cost per pupil of local authority nursery education in *(a)* East Anglia, *(b)* Suffolk and *(c)* England and Wales;

(2) what is the proportion of local authority education budgets spent on nursery education in *(a)* East Anglia, *(b)* Suffolk and *(c)* England and Wales.

Mr. Dunn: Local education authorities do not provide separate figures for expenditure on nursery classes in primary schools. The following table shows the net institutional recurrent expenditure per pupil in nursery schools for 1986-87 and the proportion of the authorities' net recurrent expenditure on education that was spent on nursery schools.

	Expenditure per nursery school pupil £ cash	*Proportion of total expenditure Per cent.*
East Anglia[1]	1,340	0·2
Suffolk	1,165	0·1
England	1,500	0·4

[1] Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk.

Information relating to Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what is the proportion of children in the three to five year age group receiving private nursery education in *(a)* East Anglia, *(b)* Suffolk, *(c)* Waveney and *(d)* England and Wales;

(2) what is the number of children attending private nursery schools in *(a)* East Anglia, *(b)* Suffolk, *(c)* Waveney and *(d)* England and Wales.

Mr. Dunn: This information is not collected centrally. Figures for Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the proportion of children in the three to five year age group receiving local authority nursery education in *(a)* East Anglia, *(b)* Suffolk, *(c)* Waveney and *(d)* England and Wales.

Mr. Dunn: Information for areas within local education authorities is not available centrally. In January 1987 the

number of children aged under five as a proportion of the estimated three and four population receiving local authority nursery education in East Anglia, Suffolk and England was 10, 14 and 23 per cent., respectively.

Figures for Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, what is the number of children in local authority nursery schools in *(a)* East Anglia, *(b)* Suffolk, *(c)* Waveney and *(d)* England and Wales.

Mr. Dunn: Information for areas within local education authorities is not available centrally. In January 1987 the number of children under five attending maintained nursery schools in East Anglia, Suffolk and England was 1,199, 162 and 49,502, respectively.

Figures for Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Teacher-Administrator Ratios

35. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the five education authorities with the highest teacher-administrator ratio and the five with the lowest teacher-administrator ratio.

Mrs. Rumbold: The figures show the ratio of qualified school teachers to school administrative and clerical staff. They are based on estimates published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) in its "Education Statistics: 1987-88 Estimates".

Local Authority	*Five highest teacher/ administrator ratios*
Dyfed	46:1
Powys	35:1
Kirklees	26:1
South Tyneside	25:1
Cumbria	25:1
Kingston	12:1
Rochdale	12:1
Barking	10:1
Leeds	10:1
Surrey	10:1

Electromagnetic Fields

36. **Mr. Maxton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what research he is supporting into the effects of electromagnetic fields on health in general, and on the incidence of leukaemia in particular.

Mr. Jackson: I understand that the Medical Research Council is not at present supporting work specifically to investigate the effects on health of electromagnetic fields. The council is, however, supporting several studies on the clustering of cancer cases, including leukaemia, and their possible causes. These studies may establish whether there is any association between the presence of electromagnetic fields and the incidence of cancer.

Research Grants

38. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he seeks from research councils on the subsequent careers of recipients of their grants.

Mr. Jackson: The Department and the Advisory Board for the Research Councils ask the research councils to supply such information as they collect for their own purposes about the first employment destinations of holders of post-graduate student awards. The Department will be discussing with the award-making bodies how the data might be improved and, in particular, how they might be collated on a consistent basis.

School Building

39. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy with regard to privatising the building of new schools.

Mr. Dunn: I have written to my hon. Friend on this matter.

Small Rural Schools

40. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what further steps he proposes to take to encourage small rural schools.

Mr. Dunn: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold) gave him on 16 February at column *819*.

Scientific Equipment

42. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will undertake a comparative survey of the scientific equipment available in academic and academically related research in the United Kingdom and other industrial countries.

Mr. Jackson: The Advisory Board for the Research Councils (ABRC) has commissioned a study of scientific equipment in United Kingdom higher education institutions. The board expects to advise my right hon. Friend about the outcome of the study, around the end of the year, taking into account such results as are available of similar studies in other countries.

Child Health and Early Education

45. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he as any plans to implement the findings of the Child Health and Education Study which reported in 1987 on "The Effects of Early Education"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has taken note of the findings of this report, which was commissioned by my Department and has been published. The broad conclusion of the report is that children can benefit from pre-school experience of a variety of forms. The Government have always accepted this and believe that their current policy of maintaining the discretionary basis of provision is therefore right.

Truancy

49. **Mr. Heddle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received about his Department's plans to reduce the level of truancy in schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: The responsibility for taking action on truancy rests with local education authorities and with schools and parents. In the course of preparing circular 2/86, "School Attendance and the Education Welfare Services", and following its publication, the Department

received information and representations from interested parties. The Department is considering issuing a further circular relating to school attendance, which would be subject to a similar process of consultation.

Secondary Schools, Northamptonshire

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list all secondary schools in Northamptonshire, stating how many pupils are currently in each school and how many empty places exist in each school.

Mr. Dunn: Information on school places is not available centrally. In January 1987 the maintained secondary schools in Northamptonshire and the number of pupils on roll in each school were as follows:

Maintained secondary schools in Northamptonshire
January 1987

Name of school	*Number on roll*
Towcester Sponne school	1,051
Weavers school, Wellingborough	1,210
Rothwell Montsaye school	1,203
Irthlingborough Huxlow school	630
Henry Gotch school	621
Moulton school, Moulton, Northampton	1,050
Manor school, Raunds	740
Chichele school, Rushden	777
Rushden boys school	638
Wellingborough John Lea school	727
Roade comprehensive school	1,047
Daventry school	805
Wollaston school	1,024
Kingsbrook school	685
Guilsborough county school	1,129
Beanfield comprehensive school	621
Kettering boys school	696
Southfield school for girls, Kettering	713
Corby Lodge Park school	943
Kingswood comprehensive, Corby	947
Bugbrooke Campion school	1,262
Prince William school upper	856
Southbrook comprehensive school, Daventry	884
Latimer school	839
Northampton Trinity school	789
Duston upper school	971
Weston Favell upper school	1,172
Northampton Mereway upper school	497
Lings upper school	866
Kingsthorpe upper school	1,070
Northampton school for girls	831
Northampton school for boys	636
Wellingborough Wrenn school	949
Grange comprehensive school	892
Chenderit school, Middleton Cheney	909
Montagu school, Kettering	748
The Ferrers school	749
Queen Elizabeth school	888
Sir Christopher Hatton, Wellingborough	953
Magdalen College school, Brackley	1,068
Bishop Stopford Church of England school, Kettering	960
Our Lady and Pope John XIII Roman Catholic school	792
Thomas Becket Roman Catholic upper school	882

Schools (Expenditure)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much is spent per pupil on education in primary and secondary schools; what are the comparable figures in cash and real terms five and 10 years ago; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: The information is provided in the following table.

Net Institutional Recurrent Expenditure[1] Per Pupil in England

	1978-79 £	*1983-84* £	*1986-87*[3] £
Primary Schools			
Cash	365	725	895
1986-87 Real Terms[2]	710	830	895
Secondary Schools			
Cash	530	1,015	1,340
1986-87 Real Terms[2]	1,035	1,160	1,340

1. Net institutional recurrent expenditure covers the cost of salaries and wages, premises and certain supplies and services. It does not include the cost of school meals, central administration and inspection, debt charges or revenue contributions to capital outlay.
2. The cash prices for the earlier years have been repriced to 1986-87 prices using the gross domestic product (market prices) deflator.
3. The latest information available on actual expenditure is for the financial year 1986-87.

Expenditure (Yorkshire)

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, what is the expenditure per pupil for each local authority area in Yorkshire for each of the past five years.

Mr. Dunn: The available information is given in the table. The figures include the cost of salaries and wages, premises and certain supplies and services. They do not include the cost of school meals, central administration and inspection, debt charges and revenue contributions to capital outlay.

Net institutional recurrent expenditure per pupil (£ cash prices) maintained primary and secondary schools

	1982-83	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
South Yorkshire Met. County					
Barnsley	818	894	959	1,016	1,122
Doncaster	818	890	946	1,005	1,145
Rotherham	749	813	875	933	1,054
Sheffield	898	992	1,012	1,111	1,255
North Yorkshire Met. County					
Bradford	788	832	906	984	1,107
Calderdale	784	828	870	944	1,091
Kirklees	752	779	835	919	1,057
Leeds	759	837	875	946	1,084

	1982-83	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
Wakefield	752	847	892	988	1,122
North Yorkshire	793	846	871	943	1,040

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what further representations he has received concerning the implications of the Education Reform Bill for children with special educational needs.

Mr. Dunn: Numerous representations on the Bill have been received from organisations and individuals. Of these, a substantial minority dealt with its implications for children with special educational needs.

Polytechnics and Colleges of Higher Education (Formation Committees)

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made in the appointment of formation committees for the polytechnics and colleges of higher education.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend has selected the members of over three-quarters of the formation committees and the institutions concerned are today being informed. We hope to complete these appointments shortly.

Teachers (Pay and Conditions)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, when the report of the interim advisory committee on school teachers' pay and conditions will be published.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The report of the interim advisory committee on school teachers' pay and conditions is being published today. I am also initiating the consultation required by section 3(1) of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1987 by writing today to the relevant local authority associations, teacher unions and bodies representing the interests of the governors of voluntary schools setting out my proposals. The text of the letter is as follows:

Text of letter of 19 April from the Secretary of State for Education and Science to the relevant local authority associations, teacher unions and bodies representing the interests of the governors of voluntary schools.

TEACHERS' PAY AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

1. On 27 October 1987 asked the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions to examine and report to me on certain issues. I enclose a copy of the Committee's report which is being published today. The Committee's recommendations are summarised in Chapter 7 of its report. I propose to make an Order giving effect to the recommendations referred to in paragraphs 2 to 6 below. But before I take a decision on what provision I should make, I invite your views. This letter therefore initiates the consultation required by Section 3(1) of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1987.

2. I propose to accept the Committee's recommendation that the salaries of all qualified teachers should be raised by a uniform percentage to the figures set out at paragraph 4.4.1 of the Committee's report with effect from 1 April 1988. As a result of accepting the recommendation in paragraph 4.1.16 about the distribution of the £300m, the salaries and allowances for unqualified teachers and the allowance for teachers of the visually impaired and hearing would be increased by the same percentage as for qualified teachers.

3. I propose to accept the recommendation in paragraph 5.3.6 that the rates of the London area allowances should be increased by 7·5 per cent. with effect from 1 July 1987.

4. I propose to accept the recommended increases in the value of the incentive allowances (paragraphs 4.3.9, 4.3.11 and 4.3.12) to the following annual amounts with effect from 1 April 1988.

Rate	*Annual Amount* £
A	800
B	1,200
C	2,400
D	3,200
E	4,400

5. I see advantages in the Committee's recommendation in paragraph 4.3.7 that the programme of introduction of the A allowances should be accelerated. I had been envisaging that there would be a further 12,000 A allowances from September 1988 with additions of a similar number in each of the two subsequent Septembers. In the light of the Committee's recommendations about accelerating the introduction of A allowances I believe that this further expansion of 36,000 A allowances should be spread over two years rather than three, with 18,000 further A allowances from September 1988 and a further 18,000 from September 1989. This will mean some revisions to the limits relating to incentive allowance A in Annex A to Appendix I of the 'School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document 1987'.

6. I propose to accept the Committee's recommendation in paragraph 5.4.11 about the social priority allowance.

7. The Order I propose to make to give effect to all of the above would do so by bringing into effect a new School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document. The Committee's remaining recommendations do not require other changes to this year's revision of the Document: I do not therefore propose to change the Document in response to these recommendations. Nor is it intended to revise the RSG settlements for 1988-89 on account of the proposals set out in paragraph 2 to 6 above.

8. Any comments on the proposals set out above and on any other matters raised in the report are invited by 10 May. If you would like to express your views in a meeting would you let my office know of this as soon as possible so that any meetings with myself or officials can take place by 13 May at the latest.

9. Following these consultations a revised version of the Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document will be prepared. There will then be opportunity to comment on the precise wording of the amendments to the Document prior to the publication of the new Document and the laying before Parliament of an Order which will give effect to the provisions in the revised Document.

10. The Interim Advisory Committee say that they hope it will be possible for a copy of the report to be seen by teachers in every maintained school. Enough copies of the report are being sent to each local education authority for a copy to be circulated to each school.

SCOTLAND

Recidivism

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the recidivism rate for *(a)* young offenders, *(b)* short-term offenders, and *(c)* long-term offenders, in Scottish prisons.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I regret that this information is not available.

Under-Sixes (Education)

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when he intends to publish the report reviewing the provision of under-sixes education in Scotland;

(2) what expenditure was incurred in compiling the Scottish Education Department report reviewing the provision of under-sixes education.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 16 March 1988 given to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood).

Student Loan Scheme

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had from the British Medical Association-Associate Members group on the subject of a student loan scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We have received a number of representations from two of the British Medical Association associate members' representatives, including one submitted by the hon. Member, together with a relatively small number of representations from individual medical students, both direct and from hon. Members. All representations received individual replies.

No conclusions have yet been reached on the future pattern of student support. We hope to publish Government proposals in the summer, when the student support review group has completed its work.

Highlands and Islands Development Board

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total subsidy expressed per head of population of the islands for the last five years paid to the Highlands and Islands Development Board.

Mr. Lang: The information is not available in the form requested.

Water Rates

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the water rate applicable for 1987-88 and 1988-89 for each regional and islands authority in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is set out in the table below.

Domestic Water Rates 1987-88 and 1988-89

	1987-88 Per cent.	*1988-89 Per cent.*
Borders	5·7	5·7
Central	4·7	5·0
Dumfries and Galloway	4·0	4·0
Fife	4·0	5·0
Grampian	6·5	6·8
Highland	5·5	5·5
Lothian	6·1	5·1
Strathclyde	4·0	4·0
Tayside	4·5	5·5
Orkney	11·0	12·0
Shetland	3·0	7·5
Western Isles	11·5	12·0

Rating Reform

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he has given to the comments by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, in its 18th report, on the Community Charges (Registration) (Scotland) Regulations 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The Joint Committee commented on Regulation 12(2)(b) and on the related supplementary inquiry form, contained in schedule 4 to the regulations, by means of which community charge registration officers may make follow-up inquiries of responsible persons in respect of premises in his area as part of the procedures for setting up the community charges register.

The first point made by the Joint Committee relates to whether the supplementary inquiry form is intended to seek information which is supplementary to the information already provided in response to the inquiry form, or which is supplementary to the matters mentioned in the inquiry form. My right hon. and learned Friend's view, as expressed in the memorandum submitted by the Scottish Office to the Joint Committee, was that what was being requested was supplementary information about the matters specified in the form, while the Joint Committee takes the view that, as drafted, the supplementary information relates to information already provided by the responsible person. That criticism of the drafting of the regulations is a question of interpretation, but in my right hon. and learned Friend's view there is no practical difference in the result.

The Joint Committee's second criticism relates to the nature of what may be requested as supplementary information. The instructions to registration officers contained in square brackets in the supplementary inquiry form suggest that documents or evidence might be requested. The Joint Committee says that it does not consider that documents or evidence can constitute information. My right hon. and learned Friend disagrees with that view. In any case, it is important to note that where the information requested does not involve documents or evidence, the point will not arise.

The Joint Committee also questions whether, if documents or information are to be provided, there is provision for them to be returned: and it says that, if documents are information and information is to be "given" to the registration officer its ownership must change. My right hon. and learned Friend does not accept that the word "given" necessarily carries that implication. The intention is simply that the information, whether or not embodied in documents, should be provided to the registration officer in response to his inquiry. Where documents are involved, the registration officer may be expected to return them to the responsible person in due course.

The comments made by the Joint Committee deal with matters of drafting and interpretation and relate only to certain specific uses to which the supplementary inquiry form might be put. They do not otherwise question the regulations, which have been made and are fully in force, and have been debated by Parliament. In particular, the Joint Committee made no comment upon, and has cast no doubt upon, the soundness of the registration process as a whole and the Committee's comments in no way prevent that process from going ahead as planned.

TRANSPORT

Bus Services

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the number of bus services registered as from 26 January 1987 and the numbers of services discontinued since that date.

Mr. David Mitchell: The number of new bus services registered from 26 January 1987 was 6,930 and the number deregistered was 6,229.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is *(a)* the reduction in conventional bus service provision and *(b)* the increase in minibus service provision since (i) the implementation of the Transport Act 1985 and (ii) the implementation of full deregulation on 26 January 1987.

Mr. David Mitchell: Information is not available in the form requested. Since deregulation there has been a substantial growth in the number of minibuses which now represent some 10-15 per cent. of the vehicles used on local services. Passengers in over 250 areas are now benefiting.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department has assessed the effect on bus transport facilities for the disabled arising from the Transport Act 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee, which was set up under the Transport Act 1985 to advise the Secretary of State, is keeping in close touch with the impact of the Act on the transport needs of disabled people. The Act places a duty on local authorities, in the provision of bus services, to have regard to the transport needs of the public who are disabled. In addition, section 106 of the Act enables local authorities to make grants for providing, maintaining or improving any vehicle, equipment or other facilities to facilitate travel by disabled people.

Passenger Transport Authorities

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the precepts and the district share of the total precept levy income paid into each metropolitan county passenger transport authority by each of the constituent districts in 1986-87 and 1987-88;

(2) what is his estimate of the poll tax precept and the district share of the total precept levy income to the paid to each metropolitan county passenger transport authority by each of the constituent districts on the basis of actual spending levels in 1986-87 and 1987-88.

Mr. David Mitchell: The figures are given in the following table. Percentage shares under the two systems are based on rateable values and population respectively. As these are fairly stable, year on year, there is very little difference between the shares for 1986-87 and 1987-88.

The change in the percentage share under the new system is a consequence of the introduction of the community charge and is not related to the proposed change to billing.

Precepts and Districts Share of total contribution
Existing System (Community Charge)

	1987-88		*1986-87*	
	Now	*CC*	*Now*	*CC*
Greater Manchester				
Passenger transport authority precept	12·96p	(£78·8m)[1]	19·99p	(£83·5m)[1]
District share of precept[2]		*Percentage*		*Percentage*
Bolton	9	(10)	9	(10)
Bury	6	(7)	6	(7)
Manchester	23	(18)	23	(18)
Oldham	7	(8)	7	(8)
Rochdale	6	(8)	6	(8)
Salford	9	(9)	9	(9)
Stockport	12	(11)	12	(11)
Tameside	6	(8)	6	(8)
Trafford	11	(9)	12	(9)
Wigan	10	(12)	10	(12)
Merseyside				
Passenger transport authority precept	28·48p	(£67·0m)[1]	44·88p	(£81·5m)[1]
District share of precept		*Percentage*		*Percentage*
Knowsley	11	(11)	11	(11)
Liverpool	35	(33)	35	(34)
St. Helens	12	(13)	12	(13)
Sefton	18	(20)	18	(20)
Wirral	23	(23)	23	(23)
South Yorkshire				
Passenger transport authority precept	34·21p	(£46·1m)[1]	44·07p	(£59·3m)[1]
District share of precept				

	1987-88		1986-87	
	Now	CC	Now	CC
		Percentage		Percentage
Barnsley	14	(17)	14	(17)
Doncaster	22	(22)	22	(22)
Rotherham	18	(19)	18	(19)
Sheffield	46	(42)	47	(42)

Existing System (Community Charge)

	1987-88		1986-87	
	Now	CC	Now	CC
Tyne and Wear				
Passenger transport authority precept	14·51p	(£57·7 million)[1]	24·27p	(£63·9 million)[1]
District share of precept				
		Percentage		Percentage
Gateshead	17	(18)	17	(18)
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	32	(25)	32	(25)
North Tyneside	16	(17)	17	(17)
South Tyneside	12	(14)	12	(14)
Sunderland	22	(26)	22	(26)
West Midlands				
Gross passenger transport authority precept	7·81p	(£56·0 million)[1]	10·32p	(£58·1 million)[1]
District share of precept				
		Percentage		Percentage
Birmingham	39	(38)	39	(38)
Coventry	11	(12)	11	(12)
Dudley	11	(12)	11	(12)
Sandwell	12	(12)	12	(12)
Solihull	8	(8)	8	(8)
Walsall	9	(10)	9	(10)
Wolverhampton	10	(10)	10	(10)
West Yorkshire				
Passenger transport authority precept	23·78p	(£59·3 million)[1]	26·50p	(£61·3 million)
District share of precept				
		Percentage		Percentage
Bradford	20	(22)	20	(22)
Calderdale	8	(9)	8	(9)
Kirklees	15	(18)	15	(18)
Leeds	41	(35)	41	(35)
Wakefield	16	(15)	15	(15)

Notes

[1] Under the community charge system, precepting authorities levy a gross amount on the collection fund to cover all their expenditure. Grant in respect of their expenditure is paid into the district collection fund together with grant for expenditure by other tiers of local government and the share of the national non-domestic rate. It is not, therefore, possible to provide a figure for the passenger transport authority demand net of grant.

[2] Percentages may not total 100 owing to rounding.

General Council of British Shipping

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the recent closure of the Cardiff office of the General Council of British Shipping; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have received no representations. I understand that the office in question is still open at present. It is for the General Council of British Shipping to decide what local offices it wishes to operate.

Roads (Skid Resistance)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the frequency of monitoring the skid resistance of trunk roads and motorways within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: On 19 January we announced a new policy which now requires the Department's agents to carry out a routine skid resistance survey on all trunk roads and motorways over a three-year period. This will make the best use of the limited number of specialist machines which are available during the summer survey period and the funds available for this work.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what type of material and seal coats are used to provide the necessary skidding-resistance on the trunk roads and motorways in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The type of material and seal coats used to provide skidding resistance on trunk roads and motorways will vary according to the condition of the road, the volumes of traffic using the road and particular characteristics of the site to be treated. The type of

treatment chosen for a particular site is a matter of judgment for the local maintenance agent in discussion with the Department's regional office.

Roads (Surfaces)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the allotted funding for the surface testing, and treatment when necessary, for all trunk roads and motorways in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It is estimated that over the first four years of this new approach the cost of surveying and treating the trunk road and motorway network will be £36 million. Thereafter it is estimated that the annual cost of continuing this policy will be approximately £2·5 million per annum. When the standard is fully implemented financial benefits from accident reductions on trunk roads will amount to £35 million a year, representing a return of £5·50 for every £1 spent.

Motorway Safety

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about his recently announced initiatives to improve motorway safety.

Mr. Channon: On 7 April I announced the outcome of a review of motorway safety begun shortly before last Christmas. Although motorways remain our safest roads, they account for nearly 250 deaths and 1,600 serious injuries each year. And when accidents occur at high speed the consequences are horrific. In the course of our review we looked at where and why accidents happen, ways of improving driving standards and skills, relevant aspects of road design and equipment, and the scope for improvements to vehicles, with the object of improving features which are particularly important on motorways. In the light of the review, we now propose to take action in the following areas:

—encouragement and promotion of better driving skills on the motorway, including encouragement to newly qualified drivers to take additional tuition in respect of motorway driving.

—introduction of mandatory speed limits at all major motorway contraflows and roadworks, and special requirements for heavy goods vehicles in contraflows.

—improved communication with drivers, through more consistent use of matrix signs, and the introduction of new, clearer versions of the "lane restriction" and "end of restriction" signs.

—changes to some regulations and standards for vehicle lighting, and improvements to measures to prevent vehicle fires.

—improvements to the design and protection of roadside features, to make them safer in the event of accidents.

I have also published, and shall be widely distributing, a new leaflet advising motorists on safe motorway driving. I am arranging for copies of this leaflet, and the pamphlet giving fuller details of all the measures to be placed in the Library of the House.

London City Airport

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he is yet able to announce the formal arrangements for public safety zones at London City airport.

Mr. Channon: The London Docklands Development Corporation is today being informed of the arrangements for public safety zones. The Civil Aviation Authority is also making formal arrangements to safeguard the airport in respect of future building in the vicinity which could be a hazard to aircraft flying close to the airport. In accordance with normal practice, the arrangements allow for possible development of the airport over the next 12 to 15 years. But they do no more than keep open existing options for the time being: any such development would be subject to normal planning controls.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Establishment (Leicestershire)

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to approve the appointment of 91 additional police officers over the next three years, and 45 new police officers during the current year, as applied for by the chief constable of Leicestershire.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) on 18 February at column *707*.

Nationality Applications

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for British nationality he has received during the year 1987; how many of these his Department has commenced processing; and how many remain (a) unacknowledged, and (b) unprocessed.

Mr. Renton: The information is not readily available in the form requested.

In 1987 we estimate that about 290,000 citizenship applications were received of which all but 33,000 had been acknowledged by 11 April. Provisional figures for 1987 indicate that grants of citizenship were made to 64,800 applicants.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for British nationality he has received since 1 January 1988; how many of these his Department has commenced processing; and how many remain *(a)* unacknowledged, and *(b)* unprocessed.

Mr. Renton: We estimate that we have received about 12,000 citizenship applications since 1 January 1988. Applications are acknowledged and processed broadly in order to receipt. Only a few applications received by post in 1988 have yet been acknowledged since priority has been given to acknowledging those received in 1987.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passports he estimates are at present held at Lunar house, received from applicants for British nationality; and what is the minimum, the maximum and the average time during which such passports are held.

Mr. Renton: It is not possible to say exactly how many passports are contained within the 45,000 citizenship applications currently awaiting opening and acknowledgement at Lunar house.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for British nationality he estimates have been lost during the past six months; and what steps are being taken in order to find the same.

Mr. Renton: There is no reason to suppose that any applications have been lost.

Mr. Paul Hill (Marriage)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the names, addresses and professions of the persons, excluding prison staff, who were present at *(a)* the marriage and *(b)* the reception following the marriage of Paul Hill to Miss Maria Seranville at Long Lartin prison: and what was the cost of this ceremony to public funds.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I do not think that it would be right to disclose the personal details requested. There were no additional costs to public funds arising from the ceremony.

US Armed Forces (British Citizens)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether any requests for extradition of British citizens deserting from the United States armed forces have been received from the United States Government or its armed forces in the last three years in respect of individuals who did not have dual citizenship.

Mr. John Patten: The total number of requests from the United States authorities for the return of deserters from the United States armed forces during the last three years was three. I now understand that one of these requests was in respect of a British citizen who does not also hold United States citizenship. I regret that the information given in my reply to a question by the hon. Member on 12 April, at column *5*, was incorrect in this respect.

Inquests (Police Investigations)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for reports from the appropriate chief constables as to whether there were any police investigations prior to verdicts being recorded at the inquests of Mr. Vimal Daihjhai, Mr. Peter Peapell and Mr. David Sands and as to whether there have been further investigations subsequently.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the appropriate chief constable that each of these cases was fully investigated by the police both before and after the inquests.

Transfrontier Broadcasting

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made at the ministerial conference in Vienna towards the establishment of a European convention on transfrontier broadcasting; if he expects such a convention to be ready for adoption and signature at the second ministerial conference on mass media policy due to take place in Stockholm in November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I represented the United Kingdom at an informal meeting of Council of Europe Broadcasting Ministers which took place in Vienna on 12-13 April. The object of the meeting was to discuss various outstanding points of difficulty on the draft Council of Europe convention on transfrontier broadcasting with a view to guiding the further work of the Council's steering committee on the mass media which is charged with finalising the text of the draft instrument.

The meeting endorsed the general framework of the draft convention and made useful progress towards resolving a number of issues, including European programme content, duration of advertising, the field of application of the convention, and its enforcement procedures.

The main issue still outstanding concerns the rules governing advertising breaks within programmes, on which no formula has yet been found which satisfactorily accommodates the differing arrangements in individual member states of the Council. Further meetings of the steering committee are plannned over the next few months at which the text will be considered in the light of the ministerial discussions, and it remains our hope that the convention can be finalised and opened for signature at or before the ministerial conference in Stockholm in November.

Residential Care Licence Applications

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will appoint additional staff to clear the backlog of accommodation for residential care licence applications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: No.

Citizenship Applications

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of the measures announced by the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex on 16 February, *Official Report*, column *863*, to reduce the delays in the processing of citizenship applications.

Mr. Renton: Good progress has been made as a result of the measures announced, and I am grateful for the co-operation of the staff and trade union side at Lunar House which has helped us achieve this. Of the 150,000 applications for citizenship received before the deadline of 31 December 1987, 117,000 have now been acknowledged, and any passport inside has been returned. Provided the present rate can be maintained, the remaining 33,000 applications will have similarly been dealt with by the middle of May 1988.

It is the Government's aim that all citizenship applications received by 31 December 1987 should be completed within two years, and further measures to achieve this will be announced shortly.

Passports

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to improve the service to those who telephone his Department's passport processing office at Peterborough so that they no longer continually get the engaged tone.

Mr. Renton *[holding answer 31 March 1988]:* As I said in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) on 7 March, at column 4, a new 24-exchange line telephone system was installed at the Peterborough passport office in July 1987.

The recorded message facility to which I previously referred is now installed and provides information simultaneously to 12 waiting callers: as this should answer many general inquiries, callers will on average ring off earlier, freeing more lines for incoming calls.

Prisoners (Brixton and Holloway)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were remanded to *(a)* Brixton prison and *(b)* Holloway prison for the purposes of social inquiry and psychiatrict reports in each of the years from 1980 to 1987.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 31 March 1988]:* Figures relating to remands for social inquiry reports are not available. Numbers of prisoners on whom psychiatric reports were prepared by prison medical officers in the years in question were as follows:

Psychiatric reports by Medical Officers on persons remanded in custody

	Brixton	*Holloway*
1980	2,440	638
1981	2,502	653
1982	2,551	612
1983	3,137	568
1984-85[1]	3,202	613
1985-86	2,885	477
1986-87	2,624	403

[1] 15 month period.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Home Helps

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the pay increase to home helps in the current year; and what was the percentage increase.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 15 April 1988]:* With effect from 1 July 1987 home helps' basic weekly pay was increased by £16·40, which represents 16·95 per cent.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of home help hours available in each unit of management in the Western health and social services board area in *(a)* 1975-76, *(b)* 1980-81 and *(c)* each year since then, including the projection for 1988-89, showing for each year the percentage change on the previous figure and the number of persons receiving home help in each year, and the applications refused.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 15 April 1988]:* The information is given in the following tables.

Table 1
Home Help Hours worked

Financial year	*Hours worked*	*Per cent. change from previous year*
Londonderry-Limavady-Strabane UoM		
1975-76	Not available	—
1979-80	604,349	—
1980-81	592,285	−1·99
1981-82	602,877	+1·78
1982-83	631,771	+4·79
1983-84	649,001	+2·72
1984-85	609,112	−6·15
1985-86	635,385	+4·31
1986-87	578,952	−8·88
1987-88	575,327	−0·63
1988-89[1]	511,000	−11·18
Omagh UoM		
1975-76	Not available	—
1979-80	242,639	—
1980-81	216,197	−10·9
1981-82	253,291	+17·16
1982-83	256,448	+1·24
1983-84	244,380	−4·70
1984-85	254,615	+4·19
1985-86	248,467	−2·41
1986-87	217,226	−12·57
1987-88	228,469	+5·18
1988-89[1]	205,000	−10·27
Fermanagh Uom		
1975-76	Not available	—
1979-80	266,632	—
1980-81	261,503	−1·92
1981-82	284,650	+8·85
1982-83	300,075	+5·42
1983-84	295,088	−1·66
1984-85	302,137	+2·39
1985-86	299,326	−0·93
1986-87	276,271	−7·70
1987-88	273,732	−0·92
1988-89[1]	247,000	−9·77

[1] Projection

Table 2
Persons receiving Home Help Service

Year ended 31 December	*Londonderry, Limavady and Strabane*	*Omagh*	*Fermanagh*
1975	1,171	611	549
1980	1,869	615	678
1981	1,905	689	822
1982	2,066	754	985
1983	2,144	734	1,078
1984	2,227	757	1,110
1985	2,552	759	1,173
1986	2,646	780	1,206

Table 3
No. of Applications not approved for Home Help Service

Year ended 31 December	*Londonderry, Limavady and Strabane*	*Omagh*	*Fermanagh*
1975	n/a	n/a	n/a
1980	82	n/a	18
1981	117	n/a	9
1982	135	n/a	11
1983	55	n/a	46
1984	35	n/a	23
1985	51	n/a	18
1986	35	n/a	58

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Clothing, Hats and Gloves

Ms. Short: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish the number of production units classified to clothing, hats and gloves on the register maintained by the Business Statistics Office.

Mr. Atkins: In 1987 there were 9,865 such units classified to group 453 of the Standard Industrial Classification 1980, that is clothing, hats and gloves. Figures in respect of the individual headings within that group, and within the production sector as a whole, are published in table 8 of *Business Monitor PA 1003.*

Records and Tapes

Mr. Butler: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has on the increase in the volume of United Kingdom trade deliveries of records, CDs and tapes between 1986 and 1987.

Mr. Atkins: Figures released by the British Phonographic Industry show that the percentage changes between 1986 and 1987 in United Kingdom trade deliveries were as follows:

	percentage
Singles	−6
LPs	0
Cassettes	+7
CDs	+117
Combined Albums	+11

Techsearch Programme (Newcastle)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what support he has given to the Newcastle technology centre's Techsearch programme; what conclusions and evaluation he has made of this programme; and what further development of this programme he proposes to support.

Mr. Atkins: Under the business improvement services scheme a grant of 55 per cent. of the cost of providing database services to eligible small firms (Techsearch) up to a maximum of £145,323 was offered on 13 August 1986 for the period up to 31 March 1989. Techsearch is a pilot project which is monitored by DTI/NE officials to ensure compliance with the terms of the offer before payments are made. Progress measured by numbers of initial subscribers has been satisfactory. It is too early for a fuller evaluation, which will be influenced by the ability of Techsearch to continue on a self-financing basis when grant payments have ended. There are no present plans to support further development on Techsearch.

Northern Region

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list all the projects in the northern region sponsored under his Department's support for marketing, support for quality, and support for design schemes: to provide a regional breakdown of *(a)* number of projects and *(b)* expenditures under each of these three schemes; and if he will list all the consultants engaged in these schemes, and their main or principal office.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The detailed information requested is available only at disproportionate cost. However, the hon. Member may wish to know that in DTI's north-east and north-west regions 232 companies have been assisted under the support for marketing scheme, 494 under the support for quality scheme and 295 under the support for design scheme. Payments made by DTI totalled £0·99 million, £1·82 million and £0·91 million respectively.

Enterprise Scheme

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many applications for assistance under the DTI enterprise scheme have been received during its first three months of operation; and how many have been granted for each of the consultancy functions being offered.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In the period from 13 January, when the consultancy initiatives were launched, and 14 April, 3,929 applications for assisted consultancy were received.

Referral of applications to the relevant scheme contractor (who matches consultant to applicant) takes place on the basis of a short initial Business Review carried out by a DTI enterprise counsellor.

By 14 April, 1,422 applications had been referred, as follows:

	Referrals
(a) Schemes available from 13 January 1988:	
Marketing Initiative	638
Design Initiative	243
Quality Initiative	307
Manufacturing Initiative	150
(b) Additional schemes available from 1 April 1988:	
Business Planning Initiative	55
Financial and Information Systems Initiative	29

Support for Design Scheme

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many applications for assistance were received and granted under the support for design scheme for each quarter of its operation.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The numbers of applications received and granted under the support for design scheme in each quarter, until its replacement by the design initiative in January 1988, were as follows:

	Applications received	*Applications granted*
1985		
Quarter 2	429	0
Quarter 3	416	38
Quarter 4	488	134
1986		
Quarter 1	553	219
Quarter 2	525	291
Quarter 3	535	283
Quarter 4	503	315
1987		
Quarter 1	455	378
Quarter 2	446	280
Quarter 3	567	246
Quarter 4	495	321
1988		
Quarter 1	120	262
Totals	5,532	2,767

Vosper Thornycroft

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if, in the light of the flotation of Vosper Thornycroft, and the price secured, Her Majesty's Government's policy remains that the compensation to the original shareholders was adequate, prompt and effective.

Mr. Maude: The recent flotation of Vosper Thornycroft is not material to the valuation of the business

at the time it was nationalised. The Government's policy is still as was stated by the then Secretary of State for Industry on 7 August 1980, that there was no satisfactory way to alter the compensation terms imposed by the Aircraft and Shipbuilding Industries Act 1977.

Leyland Bus

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to the reply of 12 April, *Official Report*, column *28*, what information he has as to how much of the £680 million of state aid to the Rover Group plc was used to fund *(a)* the write-off of the debts of Leyland Bus and *(b)* the restructuring costs arising from its sale, respectively; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: My Department receives regular returns from Rover Group giving details of the expenditure of the £680 million in its former commercial vehicle businesses and how this compares with the estimated amounts at the time of the injection. I am sure that the hon. Member will appreciate that these details (including how much, if any, remains to be spent in any business) are commercially confidential.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to the answer of 12 April, *Official Report*, column *28*, if his Department was informed of the arrangements made for the payment of the purchase price of Leyland Bus from the Rover Group plc; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: No. The arrangements for the payment to the Rover Group plc of the purchase price of Leyland Bus were a matter for the companies concerned.

Steel

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion of the crude steel production of the United Kingdom was produced in *(a)* each of the standard English regions, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland in the last year for which full figures are available.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* The figures are as follows:

Proportion of total crude steel production in 1987

	Per cent.
North	18·7
Yorkshire and Humberside	33·2
East Midlands	0·1
South East	3·4
West Midlands	0·6
North West	[1]
Wales	31·2
Scotland	12·8
Total	100·0

[1] Negligible.
Source: Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau.

Working Breakfasts

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total cost of the working breakfast in Newcastle on 13 April; how many business people attended; and how many civil servants were present.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* The working breakfast in Newcastle on 13 April was the first of six such presentations to be held during the next three months and was not costed separately. The overall estimated cost of these presentations was given in my reply to the hon. Member on 14 March 1988.

Over 200 business people and representatives of major public corporations attended the working breakfast. About 50 civil servants from headquarters and regional offices were present in a working capacity in the reception area, in the associated exhibition and as management and information support.

British Shipbuilders Ltd.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has to what sum of compensation was paid by British Shipbuilders Ltd. to Caledonian MacBrayne for errors in the design and construction of, the MV Isle of Mull; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* No compensation has yet been paid to the Scottish Transport Group though the basis for claims, which are likely to prove considerable, has been agreed. The taxpayer will also have to bear British Shipbuilders' costs for essential modifications to the vessel. These will also be considerable.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has any plans to reduce the annual state subsidy paid to British Shipbuilders Ltd.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* Although no new decisions have been taken since last autumn on the level of annual state subsidy paid to the corporation, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has made it quite clear to the House that the costs of British Shipbuilders are far too high.

Airbus

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if any progress has been made in reviewing the financing and company structure of the Airbus company, following the initiative he took in asking Sir Jeffrey Sterling to review the situation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Irving) on 13 April.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Third World Debt

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, further to the answer to the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) *Official Report*, 14 March, column *429*, he will indicate on what basis the figure of £270 million reduction in tax take due to debt write-down has been calculated; and what profit level has been assumed in arriving at this figure.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The estimate was arrived at by comparing the tax paid in 1987-88 with the estimated

amounts that would have been paid if no deduction had been available in respect of losses on irrecoverable loans in the tax computations for the relevant accounting periods. The calculations are based on the taxable profits of individual banks for the relevant accounting periods where these have been agreed, and on estimated figures where tax computations have not been finalised.

Taxation

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many tax units paid the basic rate of tax only in 1979-80, 1983-84, and for the latest available financial year; what the total revenue received in respect of those units was, in each of the three years; and what percentage this was of total income tax revenue.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Estimates are as follows:

Tax units liable at basic rate only

Year	*Number of tax units*[1] *(million)*	*Tax liability (£ million)*	*Percentage of total tax liability (per cent.)*
1979-80[2]	[2]20·9	18,500	81
1983-84	19·6	27,200	78
1988-89[3]	19·7	31,100	70

[1] Single people and married couples.
[2] Including 2·7 million tax units liable only at the reduced rate of 25 per cent. with liability of £250 million (1 per cent.)
[3] Forecast.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the yield in 1989-90 of an alternative minimum tax of 20 per cent. of gross income minus personal allowances for all taxpayers with incomes in excess of £22,000.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The full year yield at 1988-89 levels of income from an alternative minimum tax of 20 per cent. of gross income less personal allowances for taxpayers with incomes over £22,000 is estimated to be £130 million. An estimate for 1989-90 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the proportion of gross income paid in income tax, national insurance contributions and value added tax by *(a)* a married man with a non-earning wife and two children and *(b)* a married man with an earning wife and two children at half, one, one and a half, two, three, five and 10 times national average earnings in 1988-89; and what were the comparable figures in 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* Estimates of VAT payments are only available between three quarters and one and a half times average earnings. The available figures are shown in the table.

Percentage of gross income paid in income tax, NIC and VAT

Multiple of average male earnings	½	*1*	1½	*2*	*3*	*5*	*10*
One earner couple with 2 children under 11							
1978-79							
Income tax and NIC	2·5	20·9	26·2	27·9	34·8	48·8	65·6
VAT	—	2·6	2·7	—	—	—	—
1988-89							
Income tax and NIC	6·1	20·0	23·2	24·8	29·9	33·9	37·0
VAT	—	5·1	5·7	—	—	—	—
Two earner couple with 2 children under 11							
1978-79							
Income tax and NIC	−4·6	12·9	21·8	26·2	31·2	36·2	52·3
VAT	—	3·4	3·3	—	—	—	—
1988-89							
Income tax and NIC	−5·6	14·1	21·3	24·5	27·3	30·9	35·5
VAT	—	6·1	6·1	—	—	—	—

Notes:
Child benefit treated as negative income tax for consistency with 1978-79 when there were still child tax allowances.
Two earner couple assumed to jointly earn the multiple of male average earnings, split 60 per cent. earned by the husband and 40 per cent. by the wife.

Reliefs and Allowances

Mr. Barron: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate the gross cost to the Exchequer in 1989-90, or the most recent available date, of all reliefs and allowances other than personal tax allowances;

(2) if he will show the proportion of tax revenues forgone in 1989-90, or the most recent available date, through tax reliefs and allowances other than personal allowances which accrued to *(a)* the top 1 per cent., *(b)* the top 5 per cent., *(c)* the top 10 per cent., and *(d)* the bottom 50 per cent. of all taxpayers.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The total direct revenue cost of all tax reliefs and allowances other than personal allowances cannot be estimated reliably. Costs of each relief are published annually in the White Paper on the Government's expenditure plans.

The proportion of the cost of reliefs other than personal allowances going to quantile groups of income tax payers can be estimated for reliefs for mortgage interest, the business expansion scheme and pension contributions by employees and the self-employed. Estimates for 1988-89 are as follows:

Quantile group of taxpayers	[1]*Per cent.*
Top 1 per cent.	9
Top 5 per cent.	24

Quantile group of taxpayers	[1] *Per cent.*
Top 10 per cent.	36
Bottom 50 per cent.	16

[1] Proportion of cost of reliefs.
Estimates are provisional and subject to error.

Net Earnings

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update to April the information on net earnings provided in his reply of 10 February 1987, to the hon. Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington), *Official Report*, columns *177-8*.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Estimates of the levels of earnings for the top 5 per cent. of earners are not published. The information in the table for April 1979 and April 1987 is based on estimates of these levels derived from distributions of earnings published in the relevant new earnings surveys. Information for 1988 is not available yet. Earnings levels are for full-time men or women as appropriate paid at adult rates with pay unaffected by absence. Taxpayers are assumed to have no reliefs or allowances other than the appropriate personal allowances.

Earnings after tax, national insurance contributions[1] and child benefit at the level of earnings for the top 5 per cent. of earners (£ per week)

	April 1979[4]	*April 1987*
Single man		
At current prices	114·17	294·25
At constant April 1987 prices[2]	214·05	294·25
Married man[3]		
At current prices	117·98	304·79
At constant April 1987 prices[2]	221·19	304·79
Married man[3] with two children under 11		
At current prices	125·98	319·29
At constant April 1987 prices[2]	236·18	319·29
Single woman		
At current prices	72·23	181·36
At current April 1987 prices[2]	135·41	181·36

[1] At the contracted in rate.
[2] By reference to the retail prices index.
[3] Assuming no wife's earnings.
[4] Under the April 1979 tax/benefit regime.

SAYE Schemes

Sir William Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state the cost to the Exchequer for SAYE schemes for the years 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The cost to the Exchequer of exempting from tax any interest and bonus received under SAYE contracts is estimated at about £25 million in each of the three years.

Income Tax

Mr. Clay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the reductions in income tax liabilities, at 1988-89 income levels, of the proposed 1988-89 allowances, thresholds and rates and comparable figures for the 1978-79 regime indexed to 1988-89 showing *(a)* the number of tax units, *(b)* the total amount of reduction and *(c)* the average reduction per tax unit in each of the following income ranges: under £5,000, £5,000 to £10,000, £10,000 to £15,000, £15,000 to £20,000, £20,000 to £30,000, £30,000 to £50,000 and over £50,000.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 30 March 1988]:* The table shows estimates of reductions in income tax liabilities at 1988-89 income levels of the proposed allowances, thresholds and rate for 1988-89 compared with an indexed 1978-79 regime. For the comparison, the 1978-79 allowances and thresholds have been indexed in line with the increase in the RPI between December 1977 and December 1987. As child tax allowances were being phased out in 1978-79, they have been excluded from the comparison.

Range of total income in 1988-89[1]	*Number of units paying tax in 1988-89*	*Reductions in income tax compared with 1978-79 indexed regime*	
		Amount	*Average per tax unit*
£	*(million)*	*(£ million)*	*(£)*
Under 5,000	2·50	400	[2]120
5,000-10,000	7·00	2,490	[2]350
10,000-15,000	5·20	3,430	660
15,000-20,000	2·90	2,810	980
20,000-30,000	2·30	3,510	1,540
30,000-50,000	0·80	2,580	3,310
Over 50,000	0·25	4,780	20,760
Total	20·90	20,000	910

[1] All information is in terms of tax units that is, married couples are counted as one and their incomes combined.
[2] By reference to the estimated numbers who would be liable to pay tax under the indexed 1978-79 regime; this number is some 1,100,000 greater than the numbers paying tax in 1988-89, some 900,000 in the income range below £5,000 and 200,000 in the range £5,000 to £10,000.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the value to the Treasury of income tax receipts from Scotland in 1985-86, 1986-87, 1988-89 and 1989-90; and if he will express these figures as a percentage of total income tax receipts.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 13 April 1988]:* Available information for Scotland is from the 1985-86 survey of personal incomes and relates to liability to income tax rather than amount of income tax collected. Total liability in that year in Scotland was £3,420 million, before allowing for mortgage interest relief given at source. This was 8·5 per cent. of the corresponding United Kingdom figure. Information for later years is not yet available.

Budget Proposals (Effects)

Mr. Clay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average individual gain arising from each relevant component of the 1988 Budget, both at current prices and net of indexation for those at *(a)* one half, *(b)* three quarters of average, *(c)* average, *(d)* one and a half, *(e)* two, *(f)* five and *(g)* 10 times average earnings; and if he will provide comparable figures for each Budget since 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 30 March 1988]:* Information is in the tables. Further information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost. Average earnings are those for men in all occupations paid at adult rates who work a full week and whose pay is unaffected by absence. The level of average earnings for 1988-89, £244·70 per week, is a projection in accordance with the assumptions given to the Government Actuary for reviewing national insurance contributions in paragraph 3.02 of the Autumn Statement 1987; estimates are therefore provisional.

Gains (£ per week) from the main income tax proposals in the 1988 Budget

	Multiples of average earnings[1]						
	½	¾	*1*	1½	*2*	*5*	*10*
Single person (Non-aged)							
Current prices: change in							
personal allowances	0·93	0·93	0·93	0·93	1·56	2·08	2·08
basic rate limit	—	—	—	—	3·50	3·50	3·50
reduction in basic rate	1·45	2·67	3·89	6·34	7·42	7·42	7·42
abolition of higher rates above 40 per cent.	—	—	—	—	2·35	119·01	363·71
Total[2]	2·38	3·60	4·83	7·27	14·83	132·01	376·71
Net of indexation: change in							
personal allowances	0·47	0·47	0·47	0·47	0·78	1·04	1·04
basic rate limit	—	—	—	—	1·75	1·75	1·75
reduction in basic rate	1·45	2·67	3·89	6·34	7·42	7·42	7·42
abolition of higher rates above 40 per cent.	—	—	—	—	1·58	114·49	359·19
Total[2]	1·91	3·14	4·36	6·81	11·53	124·70	369·40
Married Man (Non-aged)							
Current prices: change in							
personal allowances	1·56	1·56	1·56	1·56	2·60	3·46	3·46
basic rate limit	—	—	—	—	3·50	3·50	3·50
reduction in basic rate	0·87	2·10	3·32	5·77	7·42	7·42	7·42
abolition of higher rate above 40 per cent.	—	—	—	—	0·92	113·28	357·98
Total[2]	2·43	3·65	4·88	7·32	14·44	127·66	372·36
Net of indexation: change in							
personal allowances	0·78	0·78	0·78	0·78	1·30	1·73	1·73
basic rate limit	—	—	—	—	1·75	1·75	1·75
reduction in basic rate	0·87	2·10	3·32	5·77	7·42	7·42	7·42
abolition of higher rate above 40 per cent.	—	—	—	—	0·15	108·76	353·46
Total[2]	1·65	2·87	4·10	6·54	10·62	119·66	364·36

[1] Full time adult males (all occupations) forecast earnings for 1988-89 £244·70 week.
[2] Due to rounding, components may not sum to total.

Gains (£ per week), net of indexation, from the main income tax proposals[1] *in all budgets from 1979 to 1988, at 1988-89 income levels*

	Multiples of average earnings[2]						
	½	¾	*1*	1½	*2*	*5*	*10*
Single Person (non-aged)							
change in:							
personal allowances	2·98	2·98	2·98	2·98	4·52	7·50	7·50
reduced rate band	−2·54	−2·54	−2·54	−2·54	−2·54	−2·54	−2·54
basic rate limit	—	—	—	—	2·56	2·56	2·56
reduction in basic rate	5·78	10·67	15·57	25·36	29·69	29·69	29·69
higher rates and thresholds	—	—	—	—	4·12	232·79	758·90
Total[3]	6·22	11·12	16·01	25·80	38·35	270·01	796·11
Married man (non-aged)							
change in:							

	Multiples of average earnings[2]						
	½	¾	1	1½	2	5	10
personal allowances	4·89	4·89	4·89	4·89	6·97	12·29	12·29
reduced rate band	−2·54	−2·54	−2·54	−2·54	−2·54	−2·54	−2·54
basic rate limit	—	—	—	—	2·56	2·56	2·56
reduction in basic rate	3·49	8·38	13·28	23·06	29·69	29·69	29·69
higher rate and thresholds	—	—	—	—	1·69	220·47	746·58
Total [3]	5·84	10·73	15·62	25·41	38·37	262·48	788·58

[1] Excluding abolition of investment income surcharge.
[2] Full time adult males (all occupations) forecast earnings for 1988-89 £244·70 per week.
[3] Due to rounding, components may not sum to total.

Allowances

Mr. Clay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the cost to the Exchequer at the 1988-89 tax rates announced in the Budget of the married man's tax allowance in excess of the corresponding single person's allowance; how much of this cost is attributable to taxpayers aged below 65 years; and what is the weekly value of this extra relief to the married man paying income tax at the standard rate.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 30 March 1988]:* The direct revenue cost, at 1988-89 levels of income, of the married man's allowance in excess of the single person's allowance is estimated at £4·7 billion, of which £4·1 billion is attributable to those aged under 65. The extra relief is worth £7·16 per week to a basic rate taxpayer not entitled to age allowance.

Age Allowance

Mr. Squire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the cost in the income tax year 1988-89 of amending the withdrawal rate of age allowance for pensioners incomes over £10,600 per annum so as to prevent any pensioner paying *(a)* more than a 40 per cent. effective tax rate and *(b)* more than a 25 per cent. effective tax rate.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 28 March 1988]:* The full year cost of reducing to 40 per cent. the effective rate on the band of income over which age allowance is withdrawn would be about £1·5 million at 1988-89 levels of income. An effective rate of 25 per cent. could be achieved only if age allowance was not withdrawn at all, which would cost about £190 million. Both costs are calculated by comparison with the income tax regime for 1988-89 proposed in the 1988 Budget.

Privatisation

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for each year since 1979 the amount of debt written off in each of the industries privatised, showing the amount of this expenditure which was met from *(a)* the relevant departmental programme as given in the public expenditure White Paper and *(b)* the reserve.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 28 March 1988]:* The normal practice on privatisation (of a nationalised industry or company wholly or majority owned by Government) is to repay, rather than write off debt. This repayment may be financed from the company's existing resources, the injection of new equity, or new debt finance. In some cases, the Government provide the finance to repay debts (for example, by an equity injection). Such finance is shown in the relevant departmental programme of the public expenditure White Paper. Subsequent sales of the Government's interests in a company are recorded in the privatisation programme in the PEWP.

National loan fund debt has been formally written off only in the following cases:

Year	*Company*	*Amount* £
1980-81	National Freight Corporation (under Section 45 of the Transport Act 1980)	100,000,000
1982-83	British Transport Docks Board (under Section 6(1) of the Transport Act 1981)	81,293,616
1984-85	British Telecom (BT (Extinguishment of Loans) Order 1982)	2,789,865,772
1986-87	BAA (under section 3 of the Airports Act 1986)	43,503,340

However, these write-offs had no direct effect on public expenditure in as much as they represented a reconstruction of the balance sheets of the industries concerned. In each case, having had NLF debt written off, the successor company issued new securities to be held by the Secretary of State as assets of the Consolidated Fund pending realisation.

Student Covenants

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of students supported by covenants who, following the measures announced in the Budget will *(a)* receive an increase in grant from their local education authority and *(b)* receive no such increase; and if he will give *(a)* the saving to the Exchequer in withdrawal of the tax relief on student covenants and *(b)* the expected cost of any increase in grant payments which results from the Budget measures.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* Under the Budget proposals student covenants made on or after 15 March 1988 will not be eligible for tax relief. But students receiving payments under covenants made before 15 March will continue to be eligible for tax repayments under the previous rules. The changes in levels of grant paid by local education authorities apply essentially to new students.

The yield to the Exchequer from the withdrawal of tax relief on new covenants to students is estimated at £35 million in 1988-89 rising to £135 million by 1991-92. The cost of the increase in grant payments is estimated at some £15 million in 1988-89 rising to about £50 million in 1991-92.

Mortgage Tax Relief

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the saving that would accrue to the Exchequer from limiting all mortgage tax relief to the basic rate in 1988-89.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* The direct revenue yield in a full year, at 1988-89 income levels, from restricting mortgage interest relief to the basic rate is estimated to be £280 million. This estimate is based on the mortgage interest rate of 10·25 per cent. at the beginning of 1988-89 and makes no allowance for the effect of any consequential changes to the distribution of outstanding mortgages.

Personal Tax Allowance

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the question of making the personal tax allowance fully transferable between the spouses where the income into the household is low; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 15 April 1988]:* We continue to receive representations from time to time in support of the system of transferable allowances for husband and wife described in the 1986 Green Paper, "The Reform of Personal Taxation" (Cmnd. 9756).

In his Budget my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer proposed a new system of independent taxation of husband and wife to take effect from April 1990. Under these proposals there will be a new married couple's allowance which will go to the husband unless he has insufficient income to use it himself, in which case any unused part can be transferred to his wife.

Taxation Receipts

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the value to the Treasury in 1987-88 of *(a)* expenditure taxes raised in Scotland and *(b)* national insurance and other contributions raised in Scotland; and if he will express both figures as a percentage of total Treasury receipts in respect of these two categories.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 13 April 1988]:* This information is not available.

Multiple Mortgage Tax Relief

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has estimated the effect of the withdrawal of multiple mortgage tax relief on the take-up of low-cost 100 per cent. mortgages being offered by the Nationwide Building Society to nurses and announced by the Minister of Health, on 15 December 1987, *Official Report*, columns 495-6.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* Take-up of mortgages being offered by the Nationwide Anglia Building Society under the special mortgage scheme for nurses and other National Health Service staff will depend on many factors. It is not possible to produce estimates of the impact which the changes to mortgage interest tax relief proposed in the 1988 Budget will have on take-up.

Consumer Credit (Tax)

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received in favour of a tax on consumer credit; what response he made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has received no recent representations.

Tax Credit

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the cost of introducing a system of tax credits on the basis of the personal income tax threshold and rates proposed for 1988-89 and of the new social security system, assuming that no person in receipt of benefit would be made worse off; and if he will give the estimated cost for each of the next five years assuming that *(a)* the rate of inflation averages 4 per cent. per annum, *(b)* the lowest rate of income tax is reduced to 20 per cent., *(c)* tax thresholds rise at twice the amount needed to keep pace with inflation, and *(d)* benefits are increased in line with inflation.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* It is not possible to estimate the cost since my hon. Friend has not provided sufficient information about the types of individual who would be covered by the tax credit scheme or about the level of tax credits which would be payable.

ENVIRONMENT

CFCs and Halons

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 8 March, to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan, *Official Report*, column *119*, what action he is taking to help producers and users of chlorofluorocarbons and halons to switch to environmentally safe substitutes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: The Montreal protocol itself provides an incentive to switch to environmentally safe substitutes even before consumption of CFCs and halons has to be reduced. British producers and users are actively engaged in research and development. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has awarded a grant for development of a process for recycling CFCs used in the manufacture of polyurethane foam. He will consider any application for support for research and development of substitute products, technology or processes against the criteria and objectives of the schemes which his Department operates.

Green Belt

Mr. Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he proposes to take in the light of the judgment in the Queen's Bench Division on 29 March in the case of Regina *v.* Secretary of State for the Environment, ex parte Enfield London borough council.

Mr. Waldegrave: We are considering the implications of the judgment in this case.

Richmond House

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) of 28 March, *Official Report*, columns *302-3*, whether consideration was given to the use of his own staff for the valuation of Richmond house prior to the decision to employ outside contractors.

Mr. Chope: No. For the reasons I have already explained in my answer to the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle), I decided that an independent valuation was required in this case.

Common Land

Mr. Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will place in the Library copies of the responses to the Department's common land consultation paper.

Mr. Waldegrave: Some 336 responses were received to this consultation paper. I have today arranged for copies of those where the respondents have agreed to their comments being open to public inspection to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

Planning Applications

110. **Sir Hugh Rossi:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in the light of recent announcement that many major planning applications will require environmental assessments in accordance with EC directive 85/337 from 3 July, he has any proposals to streamline the development control system at local authority level in order to reduce delays in handling planning applications.

Mr. Waldegrave: We expect only a small proportion of applications to require environmental assessment in accordance with EC directive 85/337. The figures which we publish quarterly show that a significant proportion of authorities find it perfectly practicable to deal with planning applications promptly under the existing system. We have commended to all authorities the National Development Control Forum's recent guidelines for the handling of planning applications.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much was spent by his Department on official hospitality in the financial year 1987-88.

Mr. Ridley *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* The 1987-88 provisional outturn for expenditure on official hospitality by my Department (including the PSA) is £66,000.

Don Valley UDC

Mr. Duffy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the names of *(a)* the chairman and vice-chairman and *(b)* the other members of the new urban development corporation in the lower Don Valley of Sheffield.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* I hope to do so as soon as possible.

DEFENCE

Joint Defence Procurement

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what extent he co-operates with other Commonwealth countries in joint defence procurement.

Mr. Sainsbury: There is regular contact with various members of the Commonwealth to explore co-operative opportunities in joint defence procurement, and I expect this process to continue. A number of equipments have resulted, including the CL89 drone and a magnetic anomaly detector with Canada, and the Ikara anti-submarine system, Barra sonobuoy and Jundivik target drone with Australia.

Mr. Peter Peapell

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work Mr. Peter Peapell was involved in whilst in the employment of his Department.

Mr. Sainsbury: Mr. Peter Peapell, was a lecturer at the Royal Military college of science, Shrivenham.

Dr. John Brittan

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work Dr. John Brittan was involved in whilst in the employment of his Department.

Mr. Sainsbury: It is not our policy to disclose details of the work of employees at the Ministry of Defence.

Professor Keith Bowden

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Professor Keith Bowden was ever employed by his Department.

Mr. Sainsbury: Professor Keith Bowden was a part-time member of one of the advisory boards operating under the auspices of the Defence Scientific Advisory Council.

Mr. Richard Pugh

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Mr. Richard Pugh was ever employed by his Department.

Mr. Sainsbury: No.

Nuclear Weapons Transport

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what have been the conclusions of his Department's constant review of procedures concerning nuclear weapons convoys following an incident in which one of these convoys was left standing on a public road by a locked gate of RNAD Dean hill on 9 April; whether any military of civil organisation was requested to grit the roads used by this convoy; what steps his Department has taken to seek to improve the road from West Grinstead to RNAD Dean hill subsequent to the accident involving a weapons convoy in January 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: As has been the practice of successive Governments, I am not prepared to discuss the movements

of nuclear weapons or their associated procedures, nor to confirm or deny that they may have been in any particular location at a particular time.

Harrier GR5

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to place the order for production of the second batch of Harrier GR5s.

Mr. Sainsbury: I am pleased to announce that, following the earlier announcement of the placing of orders for long lead items, an order is being placed with British Aerospace for the production of a second batch of 34 Harrier GR5s, making a total of 96 ordered for the Royal Air Force. Deliveries are scheduled to start in 1990. the additional aircraft will maintain the Harrier GR5 force into the 21st century.

Belize (Overflying)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the minimum height at which Royal Air Force aircraft are permitted to fly over land in Belize.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 18 April 1988, at column 336.

Low-flying Aircraft

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the land area of Wales is included within the United Kingdom low-flying system.

Mr. Freeman: The whole of the land area of Wales is included within the United Kingdom low-flying system.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average duration of a low-flying sortie by a fast jet.

Mr. Freeman: The average duration of a low-flying sortie by a fast jet is approximately 42 minutes.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what geographical area, expressed *(a)* by county and *(b)* by parliamentary constituency, is covered by low-flying area 3.

Mr. Freeman: Low-flying area 3 covers *(a)* part of the county of Cornwall and *(b)* the parliamentary constituencies of St. Ives, Falmouth and Camborne, and most of the constituency of Truro.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of complaints received about low flying in 1987 were identified as relating to *(a)* British military aircraft, *(b)* United States Air Force aircraft and *(c)* other military aircraft.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 15 April 1988, at column *249*.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the reasons for the decline in the number of low-flying sorties over the United Kingdom in 1987 as compared with 1986; and whether he expects this downward trend to continue in 1988.

Mr. Freeman: Low-flying activity is influenced by several factors, including the number of aircrew in training, their experience, timing of major exercises, budgetary constraints and the weather. While no increase in low-flying activity is expected for the foreseeable future, the reduction in low-flying activity between 1986 and 1987 was very small and not considered significant.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many confirmed breaches of low-flying regulations in each year since 1974 were caused by inadvertent negligence on the part of aircrew;

(2) how many confirmed breaches of low-flying regulations in each year since 1974 were caused by wilful negligence on the part of aircrew.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested cannot be provided without disproportionate effort.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *776-7*, what impact the planned reductions in Royal Air Force fast jet operational training flying hours is expected to have on the number of low-flying sorties over the United Kingdom.

Mr. Freeman: It is too early to quantify the expected reductions in fast jet flying hours referred to in the answer I gave the hon. Member on 21 January, although the effect on low-flying sorties is likely to be minimal.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the minimum height at which Royal Air Force aircraft are permitted to fly over land in Norway.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* RAF fixed wing aircraft training over land in Norway may be authorised to fly down to a minimum height of 250 ft in Norwegian low flying areas. RAF helicopters may fly below 500 ft.

RAF (Accident Statistics)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the accident rate for Royal Air Force fast jet aircraft in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) on 18 April 1988, at column *336*.

Tornado Crash, Nevada

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the circumstances surrounding the crash of a Royal Air Force Tornado in Nevada in late March.

Mr. Freeman: On the 30 March a Royal Air Force Tornado GR1 of 20 Squadron, RAF Laarbruch crashed in the Nevada desert, USA during the course of the tactical flying exercise, Green Flag. Both crew safely ejected.

The Royal Air Force has convened a board of inquiry into this accident, which will examine fully all the circumstances with a view to establishing its cause, and preventing recurrence. A summary of the board's findings will be published in due course in the usual way.

Aircraft Accidents

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all major accidents to British military aircraft in 1987, giving the date, location and type of aircraft in each case.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is as follows:

Date	*Service*	*Location*	*Aircraft type: lost/severely damaged*
1 February	RAF	Ben More, Scotland	Wessex
24 February	Navy	Falmouth Bay	Sea King
27 February	RAF	Mount Pleasant, Falkland Islands	Chinook
19 March	RAF	Binbrook, Lincs.	Lightning
23 March	Army	Soest, Federal Republic of Germany	Lynx
30 March	RAF	Near Wesel, Federal Republic of Germany	Tornado
22 April	RAF	North Sea, off Wick	Buccaneer
3 June	RAF	Manby, Lincs.	Tornado
17 June	RAF	Near Keswick	Jaguar/Tornado
24 June	RAF	Near Builth Wells	Jaguar
1 July	RAF	Near Akrotiri, Cyprus	Lightning
16 July	Army	BATUS, Canada	Gazelle
27 July	RAF	Fadmoor, Yorkshire	Tornado
26 August	RAF	Near Aberystwyth	Phantom
7 September	RAF	North Sea	Phantom
23 September	Navy	Culdrose	Sea King
15 October	Navy	At Sea, off North West Scotland	Sea Harrier
16 October	Navy	Off Lizard, Cornwall	Wessex
23 October	Army	Middle Wallop	Gazelle
2 November	RAF	Otterburn Range, United Kingdom	Harrier × 2
16 November	RAF	Welton, Lincs.	Hawk × 2
25 November	Navy	Predanneck, Cornwall	Gazelle

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 20 April 1988

WALES

Cancer Screening

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he is taking to increase capacity in health authority laboratories in Wales which handle cervical cancer smear tests; how many additional laboratory staff have been employed in each of the Welsh district health authorities to deal with cervical cancer smear tests in the past 12 months; what are the procedures for dealing with abnormal cervical cancer smear results; what private clinics in Wales give cervical cancer smear tests; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: The cervical cytology screening service is the responsibility of individual district health authorities. A total of £800,000 a year of central funds has been allocated to authorities in Wales to help them improve their cervical screening services. Laboratory staff and equipment are two of the uses to which these funds have been put.

Figures for the number of laboratory staff employed in 1987 are not yet available, but I shall write to the hon. Gentleman when they are to hand.

The procedure for dealing with abnormal cervical smear test results is a matter of operational policy for district health authorities to determine in the light of guidance given in Welsh Office circular WHC(86)31.

Information is not held centrally on smear tests in private clinics.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the average waiting time for the results of cervical cancer smear tests for each of the Welsh district health authorities for 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: The Welsh Office is monitoring the cervical cytology screening service on an annual basis. The most recent information relates to the quarter ended 31 March 1987 and was given to the hon. Gentleman in my letter to him of 11 January 1988. As I also explained in that letter, the waiting times for results during the first quarter of 1987 do not reflect the impact of developments since then including the recurring allocation of the additional £400,000 to health authorities in 1987-88. Authorities have been asked to provide up-to-date information on the time taken to notify results in connection with the annual review of their performance which will take place in the summer.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with British Rail about links from the Channel tunnel to Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend discussed the Channel tunnel with the chairman of British Rail on 5 February. He underlined the importance to Wales of good links for passengers and freight.

ENERGY

Magnox Reactors

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the current progress of the long-term safety reviews for the Magnox nuclear reactor programme.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The CEGB has completed its reviews of Bradwell and Berkeley Magnox stations and the Health and Safety Executive's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate has published its findings of the assessments of these reviews. Copies of the reports have been placed in the Library of the House. The SSEB has nearly completed its review of Hunterston A Magnox station and the HSE expects to publish NII's findings of the assessment later this year. Assessments are in hand for the other Magnox stations.

Nuclear Safety

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the agreement signed on 31 March between the Health and Safety Executive and the Soviet Atomic Energy Authorities on mutual co-operation on nuclear safety matters, in so far as it affects the pursuit of his departmental responsibilities.

Mr. Michael Spicer: On 31 March 1988 the Health and Safety Executive's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate initialled proposals for an arrangement with the state committee on the supervision of nuclear power safety of the USSR on the exchange of information on nuclear safety matters. I welcome these as a further sign of international co-operation on nuclear safety.

Wind Farms

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has any plans to evaluate the prospects for public acceptability of the three wind farms announced by his Department at the recent British Wind Energy Association conference in London.

Mr. Michael Spicer: One of the main objectives of the wind research and development programme to be carried out in collaboration between my Department and the Central Electricity Generating Board is to evaluate the public acceptability of wind farms.

Advanced Gas-cooled Reactors

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are *(a)* the current levels of support and *(b)* the levels of support, given by his Department each year since 1970, towards research on decommissioning techniques for advanced gas-cooled reactors; and through which organisations research support has been given.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Research support from the Department of Energy into decommissioning techniques is channelled through UKAEA R and D programmes. The

Department supports generic research into decommissioning techniques of general applicability to nuclear plant. Funding is estimated at £0·71 million in 1987-88, and was £0·60 million in 1986-87 and £0·30 million in 1985-86. This work is not related to specific reactor types. Support for research, development and operational expenditure relating to the demonstration decommissioning of the Windscale advanced gas-cooled reactor in 1987-88 is estimated at £2·4 million, and was £1·9 million in 1986-87 and £3·7 million in 1985-86. Total support for the project to date is estimated at £15 million.

Comparable figures for earlier years are not readily available.

PRIME MINISTER

Turkey

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister if, during her recent visit to Turkey, she took the opportunity to discuss the prospects of the sale of United Kingdom nuclear reactors to Turkey.

The Prime Minister: No.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister if, during her recent visit to Turkey, she raised the matter of the imprisonment of political dissidents, peace campaigners and trades unionists in Turkey.

The Prime Minister: No. Since Mr. Ozal's election in 1983, there have been substantial improvements in human rights in Turkey.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Greenham Common

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Attorney-General what is the estimated cost of the prosecution case against Jean Hutchinson and Georgina Smith in which the Greenham Common byelaws were found invalid; what is the estimated cost of the appeal against this decision; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: This prosecution was commenced prior to 1 October 1986 when the Crown Prosecution Service was formed and took over the conduct of the case. The information to assess the costs incurred prior to 1 October is no readily available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Since 1 October 1986 the legal fees expended to date are approximately £3,600. I am unable to estimate the future costs of the case, which is at present the subject of an appeal.

Legal Aid

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Attorney-General if he will state the detailed criteria governing eligibility for legal aid.

The Attorney-General: The precise criteria are set out in the Legal Aid Acts 1974 and 1982 and regulations made under them. Broadly the arrangements are as follows (the financial limits were revised on 11 April):

Civil Legal Aid
The applicant must have reasonable grounds for taking or defending the proceedings. His disposable income must not exceed £5,765 a year and his disposable capital must not exceed £5,000, or he must be in receipt of income support. Decisions on granting civil legal aid in individual cases are made by the legal aid administration of the Law Society.

Legal Aid for Criminal Proceedings
It must be in the interests of justice for the applicant to receive legal aid and, having regard to his disposable income and capital, his resources must be such that he requires assistance in meeting his costs. Decisions on the granting of criminal legal aid and assessment of contributions in individual cases are made by the court.

Advice and Assistance
The applicant's disposable income must not exceed £122 a week or he must be in receipt of income support or family credit. For advice and assistance his disposable capital must not exceed £850. For assistance by way of representation (ABWOR), the applicant's disposable capital must not exceed £3,000, or he must be in receipt of income support. Decisions on the approval of ABWOR in individual cases are made by the legal aid administration of the Law Society. Legal advice and assistance is available from a solicitor without prior authorisation.

If the hon. Member has a particular problem in mind perhaps he would care to write to the Lord Chancellor.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

South Africa

Mr. Steel: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy regarding the export of Land Rovers to South Africa for use by the South African military and police.

Mr. Alan Clark: Military and paramilitary versions of the Land Rover are subject to export licensing. Any application to export such vehicles to South Africa would be likely to be refused. However, the basic Land Rover, which has a widespread civilian and commercial use in South Africa, can be freely exported. To prohibit their export would be unreasonable interference with normal civil trade with South Africa.

Northern Region

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the recommendations so far agreed of the seven sector working parties established in the northern region of his Department; and if he will place in the Library the working papers of those working parties.

Mr. Atkins: The sector working groups do not make recommendations. The groups were formed to facilitate the informal exchange of ideas between industrialist and academic members on such issues as technology and training. They are not Government bodies or responsible to my Department and it is therefore not appropriate to place their working papers in the Library.

Business Improvement Services Scheme

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the annual expenditure in each British standard region on grants under the business improvement services grant scheme; what it was for the last half year; what was the share in the national total of such expenditures; what steps are being taken in the northern region to promote this grant scheme; and what liaison

arrangements exist between the Tyne and Wear and Teesside urban development corporations in the administration of this scheme.

Mr. Atkins: Expenditure on the business improvement services scheme in the English regions, for which my Department is responsible has been as follows:

	1985		*1986*		*1987*		*October 1987-March 1988*	
	£000	*per cent.*	*£000*	*per cent.*	*£000*	*per cent.*	*£000*	*per cent.*
North East	188	6	1,206	10	1,886	13	981	17
North West	1,488	45	5,358	44	4,259	30	1,634	29
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,493	45	5,433	45	7,414	52	2,951	52
East Midlands	152	5	57	1	715	5	112	2
TOTAL	3,322	100	12,055	100	14,274	100	5,678	100

The regional distribution results from the selection of eligible areas, on criteria determined by the European Community regulations. Funds available under the scheme are now substantially committed, so it is no longer appropriate to promote it. The administration of the scheme lies with my Department.

Experience from the business improvement services scheme has been valuable in devising the new measures contained in the enterprise initiative. The latter is receiving widespread and extensive publicity in all areas of the business community, including of course Tyne and Wear and Teesside.

Blyth Valley

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what new proposals he has to encourage private sector investment in Blyth Valley; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Private sector investment will be encouraged by the enterprise initiative, with its help for design, quality, marketing, manufacturing systems, business planning and financial information systems; regional enterprise grants for investment and innovation; regional selective assistance where necessary to bring about desirable projects; exports; research and technology; and in the relationship between business and the world of education.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will estimate the amount of industrial support given to Blyth Valley since 1985.

Mr. Atkins: Since 1985, £11·93 million of industrial support has been approved or offered through the regional selective assistance, revised regional development grant and support for innovation schemes to firms in the Blyth Valley parliamentary constituency area. Individual payments of over £25,000 under the original regional development grant scheme have, in addition, amounted to £2·4 million in the three calendar years 1985, 1986 and 1987.

New Zealand

Mr. Butler: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will give the latest figures for the balance of trade between the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

Mr. Alan Clark: In the first two months of 1988 trade between the United Kingdom and New Zealand showed a crude deficit of £21·9 million.

These figures should be treated with more than the usual caution because of major changes to the Customs procedures introduced in January 1988, details of which were given in a reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page), on 7 December 1987, at columns *34-35*.

Child Care

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what child care provision his Department provides for pre-school age children of the Department's employees; what child care provision for school holiday and/or after-school care is provided for employees' children aged five and over; what plans there are for increasing provision in the next five years; and how these are to be funded.

Mr. Butcher: The DTI encourages child care schemes where there is a clear need, where the scheme is financially viable without continuing subsidy and commands sufficient local support for its effective administration.

Any scheme would need to be financially self-supporting, although accommodation would be provided free of charge if it were available and suitable. In the event that accommodation was not available the Department would be prepared to cover the cost of securing outside premises for the first year of operation. There are at present no schemes operating in this Department. However, discussions have been held which may result in the setting-up of holiday play schemes in south Wales, and interdepartmentally, in London.

EC Trade Mark Office

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations Her Majesty's Government are making to ensure that the proposed European Economic Community trade mark office is sited in London; and what financial provision it proposes to achieve this.

Mr. Butcher: London has a very strong case, and we will continue to pursue it with vigour with our Community partners. We have made it clear that we are prepared to back our bid with financial support, subject of course to the approval of this House, and the Copyright, Designs and Patents Bill currently awaiting its Second Reading in this House contains the necessary enabling clause. It would not, however, be appropriate to divulge what we have offered at the moment.

Company Account (Prosecutions)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many prosecutions have been initiated by

his Department against companies for failing to register their accounts in each year since 1958; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: The available information, which relates mainly to prosecutions of directors rather than companies, is as follows:

Prosecutions initiated for failure to file[1]

Year	*Annual returns/ accounts*[2]
1958	653
1959	514
1960	687
1961	652
1962	620
1963	751
1964	1,041
1965	1,249
1966	865
1967	732
1968	151
1969	146
1970	284
1971	517
1972	731
1973	3,355
1974	2,201
1975	2,635
1976	4,483
1977	2,589

Year	*Accounts*	*Annual returns*
1978	818	2,245
1979	3,103	1,933
1980	2,290	1,430
1981	1,952	1,270
1982	1,886	1,442
1983	1,920	1,494
1984	2,928	2,190
1985	4,409	3,019
1986	5,160	3,359
1986-87[3]	5,454	3,503
1987-88[3]	5,339	2,868

[1] Prosecutions for failure to deliver accounts can be initiated only against individual directors. Prosecutions for failure to deliver annual returns can be initiated against companies and/or their officers. The majority of prosecutions are, however, initiated against individual directors.

[2] Until 1978, when the separate filing provisions for accounts and annual returns contained in the Companies Act 1976 began to take effect, accounts were required to be annexed to the annual return. There was no separate offence of failure to deliver accounts.

[3] Figures are now produced on a financial year basis.

Inward Investment

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many offices of the Government and their agencies in the United States of America are involved in encouraging investment by United States companies in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Atkins: The encouragement of inward investment from the United States, on a national basis, is the responsibility of the Invest in Britain Bureau of the Department of Trade and Industry. The bureau operates in the United States through the embassy in Washington and the 10 consulates general. In addition the Scottish Development Agency, the Welsh Development Agency and the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland have a total of six representative offices in the USA.

Chlorofluorocarbons

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) if he will take steps to encourage and assist industry to develop alternatives to chlorofluorocarbons;

(2) what provisions there are under his Department's enterprise initiative programme for the chemical industry to receive assistance for the development of alternatives to ozone-depleting chlorofluorocarbons.

Mr. Atkins: Assistance to companies which is available within the enterprise initiative is described in the White Paper "DTI—the department for Enterprise", presented on 12 January (Cm. 278) and in the enterprise initiative booklets, copies of which have been placed in the Library. Chemical companies within the relevant eligibility criteria should make full use of this assistance.

Companies themselves are, of course, best placed to assess the implications of changes in their markets. The Montreal protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer gives encouragement to the commercial development of alternatives and I understand that industry, including users of controlled substances, is doing this.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much was spent by his Department on official hospitality in the financial year 1987-88.

Mr. Butcher *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* During the financial year 1987-88 this Department has incurred expenditure of approximately £300,000 on official entertainment and hospitality. This excludes similar expenditure incurred as an integral part of external expenditure programmes.

TRANSPORT

Roads (Maintenance)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the average cost of the annual maintenance and upkeep of the United Kingdom's trunk roads and motorways.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The average cost per mile of all maintenance on trunk motorways and other trunk roads in Great Britain is estimated to be about £42,000 in 1988/89. Comparable figures for Northern Ireland are not available because of the different classification of roads there.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure that no extension of the practice of securing the management of motorway maintenance by engineering consultations, as set down in "Policy for Roads in England: 1987," Cm 125/1, will take place until the initial five-year contract periods in Greater Manchester and south-west Yorkshire have been completed; and if he will publish his Department's assessment of the relevant consultant's performance.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I see no reason to delay assessment of the consultants' performance until the end

of the five-year period. The Department intends to carry out in the next few months an assessment of the cost and the level of service of contracted-out motorway maintenance in comparison with those of conventional agency arrangements. We intend to present the results and conclusions of the appraisal to the standing committee on highway maintenance.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to publish any audits resulting from his Department's proposal for the technical auditing of motorways and trunk road maintenance.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Technical audit is intended to improve the performance of the Department's agents and consultants through the indentification of good practice that can be brought to the attention of other agents and consultants. The Department intends to commence technical audit on a general basis in 1989-90. The Department will discuss with representatives of its agents and consultants whether publication of individual audits would help or hinder the objective.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish immediately the details of the contract between his Department and the engineering consultants engaged in motorway maintenance for his Department in Greater Manchester and South and West Yorkshire; and if he will make it his policy to publish future such contracts.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The details of all departmental contracts are commercially confidential. They are not published. I am placing the model agreement for motorway maintenance commissions in the Library.

A50 (Stoke-on-Trent)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) pursuant to his parliamentary reply to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South, 25 March, *Official Report*, column *267*, about the A50, if he will name the main roads in urban areas which have all the following: *(a)* a higher traffic count than on the A50 at the Meir Stoke-on-Trent, *(b)* a percentage of heavy vehicles of over 19 per cent. and *(c)* within 5 miles of the point where the traffic count is taken, have only one main lane in each direction and have private housing bordering on to the road;

(2) pursuant to his replies about the A50 to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South, 25 March, *Official Report*, column *267*, which of *(a)* the roads named as having the highest traffic counts and *(b)* the roads in the west midlands named as carrying a higher volume of traffic than on the A50 at the Meir Stoke-on-Trent, have a percentage of heavy vehicles greater than the 19 per cent. at the Meir;

(3) pursuant to his answers to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South, 25 March, *Official Report*, column *267*, how many traffic lanes there are at the points where the traffic counts were taken for *(a)* the A50 at the Meir, Stoke-on-Trent and *(b)* for those built up roads having the highest traffic count; and if he will express the traffic count figures in terms of traffic per 12 hours per traffic lane;

(4) pursuant to his reply to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South, 25 March, *Official Report*, column *267*, as to the A50, for those parts of the roads within five miles of the point where the traffic count is taken, what is the maximum number of traffic lanes on the *(a)* A50 at the Meir, in Stoke-on-Trent and *(b)* roads named as having the highest traffic count; and if he will express the traffic count as the number of vehicles per minimum number of traffic lanes on these roads;

(5) pursuant to the reply to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South on 25 March, *Official Report*, column *267*, how many of the roads in the west midlands conurbation named as carrying higher volumes of traffic than on the A50 at the Meir, Stoke-on-Trent, have, within 5 miles of the point where the traffic count is taken *(a)* only one main lane in both directions and *(b)* houses bordering directly on to the road.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The requested information is not readily available. I shall write to the right hon. Member.

Ships (Radio Officers)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the circumstances under which permission is granted for *(a)* any vessel and *(b)* a passenger ferry to travel without carrying a radio officer.

Mr. David Mitchell: Radio communications equipment on ships has become simpler to operate over recent years. Use of the on-board radiotelegraphy (morse) — which requires a radio officer — is declining in favour of simpler and more effective radiotelephone systems.

Circumstances in which the Department is prepared to grant passenger or other vessels exemptions from the relevant regulations are considered on a case-by-case basis. They take into account both guidelines issued by the International Maritime Organisation and the results of trials carried out by the Department on the introduction of new radio equipment and practices.

East London River Crossing

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he now expects to publish the report of the public inquiry into the east London river crossing and to announce his decision on the project.

Mr. Channon: The inspector's report is being given very careful consideration. I cannot yet say when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and I will be able to announce our decision and publish the report.

Air-sea Rescue Services (Helicopters)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if there has been any discussion or consultation between his Department and the Civil Aviation Authority as to whether the replacement of Sea King helicopters with Wessex helicopters at RAF Coltishall may reduce the effective capability of the air-sea rescue services in the event of a civilian emergency.

Mr. David Mitchell: The deployment of military search and rescue helicopters is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Defence, but he consulted my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport about the planned changes. The new deployment of RAF helicopters on the east coast will more than meet the minimum criteria recommended by the Helicopter Coverage Group, and my

right hon. Friend is satisfied that they adequately meet the civil requirement. The Civil Aviation Authority is not responsible for search and rescue arrangements.

Underground Trains

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies he has undertaken or commissioned concerning the design and construction of underground train carriages on the open plan system adopted by the MRT in Singapore.

Mr. David Mitchell *[holding answer 13 April 1988]:* Under the terms of an agency agreement between my Department and the Mass Rapid Transit Corporation, inspecting officers of railways have inspected and carried out safety audits of the Singapore system. These inspections included the rolling stock and, in accordance with the agreement, reports have been made to the board of the MRT Corporation.

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will pay an official visit to study and report on the design and operation of the MRT subway system in Singapore.

Mr. David Mitchell *[holding answer 13 April 1988]:* I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for drawing my attention to certain crime prevention aspects of coach design, including that of the Singapore MRT system, and when an opportunity presents itself I shall look closely at the open plan feature to which my right hon. Friend has drawn my attention.

Road Programme

Mr. Carttiss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he proposes to add any further schemes to the road programme.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[pursuant to his reply, 18 April 1988, c. 370]:* The estimated works cost of schemes 1 and 4 includes sums of £5·2 million and £2·2 million respectively shown in table 4 of the White Paper "Policy for Roads in England: 1987" (Cm. 125).

HOME DEPARTMENT

Unemployment and Crime

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what studies he has made of any correlation between the change in regional unemployment rates with the change in crime rates over the last 18 months; and what were the results.

Mr. John Patten: Research has not shown significant associations between changes in recorded crime and changes in unemployment. The article "Unemployment and Crime", in Home Office research bulletin No. 14/82, copies of which are in the Library, reviewed research evidence on the association between unemployment and crime and concluded that little further could be learnt from studies of this topic at aggregate level.

Prison Population (Statistics)

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the proportion of the prison population with literacy or numeracy problems.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The prison department does not have information on the proportion of the prison population with serious literacy or numeracy problems.

However, a recent survey showed that of those adult inmates who were tested, 6·2 per cent. were found to have a reading age of eight years or less, and 9·4 per cent. one of 10 years or less. The figures for youth custody centre trainees were 5·9 per cent. and 11·3 per cent., and for detention centre trainees, 5·3 per cent. and 12·8 per cent., respectively.

Prisoners (Statistics)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the proportion of prisoners in each security category.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 31 March 1988, the most recent date for which information is available, 1·6 per cent. of sentenced adult male prisoners were in security category A, 17 per cent. in category B, 45·1 per cent. in category C and 17 per cent. in category D. The remaining 19·3 per cent. were recorded as uncategorised.

Kirkham Prison

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances prisoners at Kirkham prison are currently prevented from making telephone calls; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Payphones have been provided for use by inmates at Kirkham prison since last year. I am not aware of any interruption to this facility.

Ballot Papers

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek to amend the Representation of the People Act or the rules thereunder to ensure that the layout of the ballot papers for parliamentary elections comply precisely with the Local Elections (Principal Areas) rules 1986 and the Local Elections (Parish & Communities) Rules 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The form of ballot papers for parliamentary elections is laid down in the Parliamentary Election Rules (schedule 1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983). The Local Election (Principal Areas) Rules 1986 and the Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) Rules 1986 relate only to local elections. We have no reason to believe that these statutory rules are not being complied with, but if my hon. Friend is aware of a particular problem perhaps he would write to me about it.

Marconi (Fire Service Equipment)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has received representations on the delays in the delivery of fire service central mobilising systems by Marconi to fire and civil defence authorities.

Mr. John Patten: No. I understand that of the seven fire and civil defence authorities, only London is in the process of installing a Marconi system. We are informed by the authority that, despite some delay, it is anticipated that the system will be operational by the end of the year.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department will monitor the cost of the central mobilising system on order by fire brigades.

Mr. John Patten: No. The provision of brigade mobilising systems, including costs, is the responsibility of fire authorities.

Child Care

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what child care provision his Department provides for pre-school age children of the Department's employees; what child care provision for school holiday and/or after school care is provided for employees' children aged five and over; what plans there are for increasing provision in the next five years; and how these are to be funded.

Mr. Douglas Hurd: No facilities are provided for the pre-school age children of staff. For older chidren, we participate in an interdepartmental holiday playscheme in the Bootle area. We have no immediate plans to increase the provision of child care facilities but would be willing to consider proposals put forward by staff or trade union representatives for schemes which would be expected to become self-financing.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force to indicate, from his inspection of the membership records and applications for membership of the Dunmore shooting centre, Abingdon, how many of the memberships issued which commenced at number 50 to number 92 had been granted to those applicants resident in the Thames Valley police force area; and how many applications resulted in full membership being granted prior to or on 8 December 1986.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable of Thames Valley that the information is not available.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force naming the source of advice and individuals that gave expert testimony to the chief constable that the ammunition used by the late Michael Ryan was classified as armour piercing;

(2) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force naming the source of advice and individuals that gave expert testimony to the chief constable that the rifle possessed and used by the late Michael Ryan was a Kalashnikov.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable that he received some technical advice from within the Thames Valley and from the forensic science service.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force as to what good reason and on what date the late Michael Ryan gave for the purchase of his first two rifles *(a)* an assault 7·62 mm calibre and *(b)* an assault 0·30 in calibre and appropriate ammunition, for his introduction to rifle shooting; and on what ranges.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply to his question on 31 March 1988, at column *692*. There is no requirement in the Firearms Act 1968 for the purchaser of a firearm authorised to be held by the police to notify them of its acquisition.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force as to what special circumstances were taken into consideration when agreeing to accept provisional membership of three months with the Dunmore shooting centre, Abingdon, as suitable for the issue to its members of firearms certificates by Thames Valley police.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable of Thames Valley that it is not the practice to issue firearms certificates to applicants holding probationary membership.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force as to how many firearms clubs were sent letters from the chief constable signed by Inspector Lambert for or on behalf of the chief constable prior to 19 August 1987 requiring provisional membership of a firearms club for the purpose of obtaining a firearms certificate issued by the Thames Valley police force to be a minimum period of six months.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The chief constable of Thames Valley is not aware of any such letters.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force as to what firearms the late Michael Ryan requested authority to possess on his original firearms form 1 application for the grant of a firearms certificate from the chief constable;

(2) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force as to what firearms were subsequently granted by the chief constable to the late Michael Ryan as a result of his original firearms form 1 application for the grant of a firearms certificate.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable of Thames Valley that Michael Ryan originally applied for and was granted authority to possess one 9mm pistol and one ·38 revolver.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force listing for each calibre of firearm the maximum quantity of ammunition for which the late Michael Ryan requested authority to possess on his applications for variations of his firearms certificate;

(2) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force listing for each calibre of firearm the maximum quantity of ammunition at any one time for which the chief constable granted authority for the late Michael Ryan to possess as a result of his original firearms form 1 application for the grant of a firearms certificate;

(3) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force listing for each calibre

of firearm the maximum quantity of ammunition at any one time the late Michael Ryan requested authority from the chief constable to possess on his original firearms form 1 application for the grant of a firearms certificate;

(4) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force listing for each calibre of firearm the maximum quantity of ammunition at any one time the chief constable granted authority for the late Michael Ryan to possess as a result of his firearms form 1 application for the variation of his firearms certificate.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police that Michael Ryan applied for and was granted authority to possess a maximum at any one time of 500 rounds of 9mm, ·38, ·22, ·32, 7·62mm and ·30 calibre each.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force as to the dates and ranks of police officers carrying out the checks with the local intelligence officers with respect to the applications by the late Michael Ryan for the grant and variations of his firearms certificate;

(2) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force as the dates and ranks of police officers who acted as local intelligence officers in respect to the applications for the grant and variations of the firearms certificate issued to the late Michael Ryan.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable of Thames Valley that detailed records of the checks made are not available.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Thames Valley to establish at what time the late Michael Ryan is alleged to have put on his bullet-proof vest on 19 August 1987.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable of Thames Valley that witnesses' recollections put the time at which Michael Ryan put on his bullet-proof vest as between 12·45 and 12·55pm

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force as to on what dates police officers, and of what ranks, acting as crime prevention officers, visited the house of the late Michael Ryan for the purpose of inquiries regarding the applications he made in relation to his firearms certificate.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply to his question on 31 March 1988, at columns *689-90*.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Thames Valley as to the possessions recovered from the car of the late Michael Ryan, and to where, and by what ranks of officers they were conveyed, giving times.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The chief constable of Thames Valley tells me that a police constable and scenes of crime officer recovered from Ryan's car the following items:

(a) A number of spent fragmented bullets
(b) 7 live rounds of ammunition
(c) Empty pistol magazine
(d) Rifle magazine for a ·30 rifle containing 29 rounds
(e) Leather shoulder holster
(f) Shooting magazine (periodical)
(g) Petrol receipts
(h) Instruction leaflet for a shotgun
(i) Street map of Newbury
(j) Body armour waistcoat
(k) Gas mask
(l) Woolen balaclava
(m) Water bottle
(n) Survival kit
(o) Waterproof jacket
(p) Camouflage trousers
(q) Waxed cotton over-trousers
(r) Waterproof poncho
(s) Green haversack
(t) Beige-coloured haversack
(u) Ear defenders

Items *(a)* to *(e)* were taken to the forensic science laboratory for examination. The further information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Thames Valley as to the ranks of officers who attended to the body of the late Michael Ryan; if he will list the possessions recovered from the body; and to where, and by whom, the body and possessions were conveyed from the school at Hungerford, giving times.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable of Thames Valley that a detective superintendent, detective inspector and sergeant attended Michael Ryan's body at the John O'Gaunt school. At the school they recovered:

(a) Two 9mm spent cartridge cases.
(b) One pair of handcuffs.
(c) One weapon cleaning kit.
(d) One 9mm misshapen bullet from classroom noticeboard.
(e) One 9mm spent cartridge case under body.
(f) One 9mm Beretta pistol and magazine containing 5 live rounds.
(g) One 9mm live round.

These items were taken by the sergeant to the forensic science laboratory and following examination were retained in police custody.

At the post mortem the following items were taken from the body and retained in police custody:

(a) Flak jacket.
(b) Pair of boots.
(c) Pair of socks.
(d) Pair of trousers.
(e) Pair of underpants.
(f) Shirt.
(g) Vest.
(h) Handkerchief.
(i) Knotted cord.
(j) Shoe lace.
(k) Library ticket.
(l) 2 × 2p bronze coins.

The additional information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of all questionnaires developed by his Department to assist police officers in their inquiries when visiting applicants for the grant, variation and renewal of firearms certificates and all such amended variations of such questionnaires since 1968 to include drafts and any final copies of those forms recommended by his recent working parties.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No forms have been devised by the Department to assist in firearm certificate applications save for those prescribed in the Firearms Rules 1969.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library copies of the reports prepared by the chief constable of Thames Valley police force for his Department, which were sought as a result of the parliamentary question asked by the hon. Member for Londonderry, East about the murders committed by the late Michael Ryan.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has anything to add to his answer of 31 March to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East *Official Report*, columns *693-4*, concerning the sale and transfer by the late Michael Ryan of all firearms possessed by him; if he will make a statement as to what further information is held by the chief constable of Thames Valley police; and if he will also provide information on the date of purchase, sale or transfer of all shotguns in the possession of the late Michael Ryan, giving the make, model and quantity of ammunition in each case and the names of all firearms dealers involved.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have nothing to add to my reply of 31 March concerning the firearms possessed by Michael Ryan. He was granted a shotgun certificate in 1978. The Firearms Act 1968 does not contain a requirement to notify the sale or transfer of a shotgun or shotgun cartridges.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force as to whether on 19 August 1987 a police constable offered to a police officer the use of his personal and privately owned handgun stored in Hungerford for the purpose of containing the late Michael Ryan.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The chief constable of Thames Valley tells me that he knows of nothing to substantiate this statement.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force as to whether the late Michael Ryan practised police pistol and other styles of target shooting with officers of the Thames Valley police.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The chief constable of Thames Valley has no such information.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Thames Valley police as to what route Michael Ryan was taking from Hungerford on 19 August 1987 when he killed his first victim; and how far the site of this murder was from the direct route between Ryan's home and the Wiltshire shooting centre.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable of Thames Valley that inquiries have not established Michael Ryan's route from Hungerford to the Savernake forest, the location of the first killing. However, the forest borders the A4 road which would have been the most direct route between his home and the Wiltshire shooting centre.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force as to how many Thames Valley police officers, shot at, or were members of the club run by the Berkshire Downs Firearms and Ballistics Company based in Membury, when managed by proprietor George Sturm;

(2) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force as to how many Thames Valley police officers, shot at, or were members of the club run by the Berkshire Downs Firearms and Ballistics Company based in Membury, when managed by proprietor George Sturm, on the date the late Michael Ryan applied for membership;

(3) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force as to the date on which the late Michael Ryan was granted full membership of the club run by the Berkshire Downs Firearms and Ballistics Company based in Membury, when managed by proprietor George Sturm, stating by whom, after what assessment, and by what procedure;

(4) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force as to the date the late Michael Ryan was granted provisional membership of the club run by the Berkshire Downs Firearms and Ballistics Company based in Membury, when managed by proprietor George Sturm, stating by whom, after what assessment, and by what procedure;

(5) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force as to the date the late Michael Ryan's application for membership was received by the club run by the Berkshire Downs Firearms and Ballistics Company based in Membury, when managed by proprietor George Sturm, and by whom;

(6) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force as to what date the late Michael Ryan made written application for membership of the club run by the Berkshire Downs Firearms and Ballistics Company based in Membury, when managed by proprietor George Sturm;

(7) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force as to how many entries were made by the late Michael Ryan in the register of users of the range facilities of the club run by the Berkshire Downs Firearms and Ballistics Company based in Membury when managed by proprietor George Sturm;

(8) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force as to how many visits were made, and on what dates, the late Michael Ryan paid visits to the club run by the Berkshire Downs Firearms and Ballistics Company based in Membury when managed by proprietor George Sturm.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable of the Thames Valley that one of his officers was a member of the club in question. He has no knowledge of Michael Ryan having been a member.

Greenham Common

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions at Newbury magistrates court under the Greenham common military lands byelaws were found invalid on 25 February; how many cases are outstanding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: There were two cases before the Crown court at Reading on 25 February. The number of other cases outstanding is not available from records of

court proceedings held centrally. The Crown Prosecution Service has now appealed against the decision given on 25 February, and it would not be appropriate for me to make any further statement.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on what date the club, run by the Berkshire Downs Firearms and Ballistics Company based in Membury when managed by proprietor George Sturm, was first granted Home Office approval; and on what subsequent dates this approval was reviewed and certificates reissued or renewed;

(2) if he will *(a)* list and *(b)* place in the Library copies of all relevant documents relating to inquiries made and completed by the Home Office and Thames Valley or other police forces into the applications by the club run by the Berkshire Downs Firearms and Ballistics Company based in Membury when managed by proprietor George Sturm, for consideration for the issue, amendment, addition to, or renewal of, the Home Office approval certificates;

(3) if he will *(a)* list and *(b)* place in the Library a copy of all documents submitted in the course of the applications by the club run by the Berkshire Downs Firearms and Ballistics Company based in Membury when managed by proprietor George Sturm, to the police or the Home Office for the issue, amendment, addition to, or renewal of the Home Office approval certificates;

(4) if he will place in the Library a copy of the original Home Office approval certificate for the club run by the Berkshire Downs Firearms and Ballistics Company based in Membury when managed by proprietor George Sturm, and any subsequent amendments or additions to, and renewals of it.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The club was approved for the use of small and full-bore rifles and pistols on 30 April 1986. The approval was withdrawn on 27 May 1987 in the light of information from the Thames Valley police that the club had ceased to operate.

It is not the practice to place such documents in the Library.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force to establish whether or not the chief constable placed before the coroner, for his consideration prior to or during the inquest into events on 19 August 1987 involving the late Michael Ryan, statements and copy documents provided by the Wiltshire shooting centre and its proprietors.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable of Thames Valley that statements and copy documents provided by the Wiltshire shooting centre and its proprietors were placed before the coroner prior to the inquest.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force listing all the firearms clubs that his inquiries have revealed the late Michael Ryan either visited, applied to join, or joined;

(2) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force listing all the firearms ranges that his inquiries have revealed the late Michael Ryan visited to shoot.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable of Thames Valley that Michael Ryan is not known to have visited firearms clubs other than the two of which he was a member.

Firearms Certificate (Gwent)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for East Londonderry of 13 April, what is his assessment of the implications for policy on the efficiency of police procedures of the failure to draw the letter, reference MLB/JD, dated 19 January 1985, to the attention of Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Nil.

Crime Detection

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance has been issued to chief officers of police about the practice of recording crimes as detected following visits to persons serving custodial sentences.

Mr. Hurd: Copies of the guidance circulated to all chief officers by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary have today been placed in the Library.

Lunar House, Croydon

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of unopened letters on 21 March at Lunar house, Croydon; and of those how many were *(a)* applications for citizenship and *(b)* applications for variation of leave.

Mr. Renton *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* On 21 March, 54,700 applications for citizenship were unopened and a further 41,700 applications for citizenship were opened but not acknowledged; 40,400 other items of mail, principally relating to variations of leave, were unopened. The position has since been further substantially improved, as set out in my reply, on 19 April, at column *410*, to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) about the position as at 11 April.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Derelict and Unused Land

73. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement as to what steps are being taken to sell off vacant, dormant and derelict land in the ownership of Government Departments.

Mr. Major: Government Departments are encouraged to list all their surplus land on the land registers. Since the land registers were set up in 1981, over 42 per cent. of Crown land listed has been sold or brought back into use. Departments assess their land holding operational requirements regularly, and discuss plans for disposals with the Treasury.

Child Care

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what child care provision his Department

provides for pre-school children of the Department's employees; what child care provision for school holiday and/or after school care is provided for employees' children aged five and over; what plans there are for increasing provision in the next five years; and how these are to be funded.

Mr. Brooke: No child care provision is currently provided by my Department. Any provision which was set up in the next five years would have to be self-financing.

Finance Ministers Meeting

Mr. Sackville: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the recent meetings of Finance Ministers in Washington.

Mr. Lawson: A number of meetings of Finance Ministers took place in Washington last week.

There was useful progress on a range of issues. The major industrial countries reaffirmed their commitment to co-ordinate economic policies and promote greater exchange rate stability.

The problems of the poorest, most heavily indebted countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa were again highlighted. I welcome in particular the establishment of the enhanced structural adjustment facility (the ESAF) where the United Kingdom has pledged the largest single contribution to the interest rate subsidy on ESAF lending; and the World Bank's special programme of assistance for sub-Saharan Africa. Progress has also been made on the United Kingdom's own initiative to provide debt relief to the poorest countries through the Paris Club, and I am continuing to work to secure agreement on interest rate reductions on Paris Club reschedulings.

There was general agreement that the continuing problems of highly indebted middle-income countries are best dealt with by continuation of the present approach and by further exploring market-related solutions, including extensions of the "menu" of options.

Copies of the communiques issued and of my statements to the meetings have been deposited in the House of Commons Library.

CIVIL SERVICE

Ethnic Monitoring

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service whether he will announce the results of ethnic monitoring of recruitment by the Civil Service Commission.

Mr. Luce: The Civil Service Commissioners' annual report, published today, reports on the commission's recruitment activities in the calendar year ending 31 December 1987. It also sets out and reviews the results of the first year of their ethnic monitoring. A copy of the annual report and of two research studies relating to the work on ethnic monitoring is available in the Libraries of Parliament.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service on what basis the categories of human groups listed on the official forms for the purposes of ethnic monitoring of Civil Servants were chosen.

Mr. Luce: The ethnic origin categories used in the Civil Service monitoring surveys were based on advice from the Commission for Racial Equality and the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys and on the results of a pilot survey in Leeds in 1982.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Primary and Secondary Pupils

Ms. Armstrong To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the number and proportion of primary and secondary pupils in classes of over 30 pupils in each local education authority.

Mr. Dunn: The number and proportion of pupils in maintained primary and secondary schools in classes of over 30 pupils in each local education authority in England in January 1987 is given in the table. The analyses relate to classes taught by one teacher at a selected time on the day of the census count in January and do not necessarily represent the pattern of classes over the academic year as a whole.

Number and proportion of pupils in one teacher classes of over 30 pupils January 1987

	Primary[1]		*Secondary*[1]	
	Pupils	*per cent.*	*Pupils*	*per cent.*
Barking	714	5·7	95	1·2
Barnet	2,260	11·3	1,092	6·6
Bexley	3,813	24·4	808	6·1
Brent	898	5·1	286	2·5
Bromley	4,226	22·8	1,279	8·2
Croydon	4,456	20·6	1,657	9·9
Ealing	2,885	14·3	384	3·4
Enfield	5,083	27·2	2,123	13·5
Haringey	247	1·7	31	0·3
Harrow	3,684	26·5	426	4·9
Havering	3,303	18·8	1,345	8·3
Hillingdon	3,044	18·5	941	7·1
Hounslow	3,158	21·5	928	7·8
Kingston upon Thames	2,715	33·5	849	12·4
Merton	1,930	25·1	515	4·7
Newham	589	3·3	312	2·4
Redbridge	7,383	49·2	1,451	11·5
Richmond upon Thames	1,278	15·5	440	7·2
Sutton	3,289	32·8	1,638	15·9

	Primary[1]		Secondary[1]	
	Pupils	per cent.	Pupils	per cent.
Waltham Forest	2,115	14·5	93	0·8
Inner London	3,159	2·5	2,165	2·3
Birmingham	28,543	33·0	7,632	11·8
Coventry	5,065	21·2	1,035	5·2
Dudley	7,118	29·0	736	4·0
Sandwell	6,426	25·0	828	4·2
Solihull	5,199	32·3	1,520	10·2
Walsall	3,172	15·4	1,048	5·0
Wolverhampton	2,832	14·1	753	4·4
Knowsley	1,931	12·9	552	5·4
Liverpool	6,048	14·6	2,572	9·0
St. Helens	3,741	25·0	956	7·0
Sefton	5,726	24·9	1,970	10·3
Wirral	4,528	17·1	1,875	8·9
Bolton	9,378	42·3	1,411	8·0
Bury	4,049	30·3	1,668	15·4
Manchester	6,765	19·4	1,702	6·6
Oldham	7,282	38·2	1,035	7·3
Rochdale	4,845	31·5	707	4·7
Salford	3,674	18·9	573	4·0
Stockport	6,117	27·6	1,849	9·8
Tameside	5,051	28·1	1,210	8·5
Trafford	5,470	37·2	426	3·5
Wigan	7,241	29·6	1,305	5·7
Barnsley	1,795	10·1	375	2·5
Doncaster	2,801	11·9	1,369	6·5
Rotherham	2,216	10·3	1,516	8·6
Sheffield	3,314	9·0	924	3·1
Bradford	4,191	14·2	3,199	8·3
Calderdale	4,187	25·5	1,088	8·8
Kirklees	6,536	21·9	1,620	5·9
Leeds	10,449	25·7	4,807	9·2
Wakefield	4,599	20·5	2,037	8·9
Gateshead	825	5·1	945	7·7
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	3,245	18·6	583	3·4
North Tyneside	417	3·0	441	3·2
South Tyneside	1,357	10·7	283	3·0
Sunderland	3,680	14·1	2,052	10·5
Isles of Scilly[2]	0	0·0	0	0·0
Avon	32,201	46·1	5,323	9·8
Bedfordshire	8,165	24·3	3,510	8·7
Berkshire	16,784	32·8	4,889	10·6
Buckinghamshire	23,699	43·6	2,066	6·4
Cambridgeshire	14,641	29·7	4,285	11·2
Cheshire	28,981	37·7	9,871	14·7
Cleveland	8,046	16·5	1,788	4·4
Cornwall	11,714	34·3	3,657	12·6
Cumbria	5,897	16·5	2,048	6·2
Derbyshire	18,316	26·6	6,218	10·3
Devon	17,363	26·0	5,123	9·2
Dorset	13,800	40·0	3,293	9·1
Durham	11,600	23·8	3,644	10·0
East Sussex	13,783	33·7	4,135	12·0
Essex	30,912	26·8	8,796	8·8
Gloucestershire	12,972	34·2	4,022	12·7
Hampshire	33,760	29·9	7,496	8·5
Hereford and Worcester	13,386	30·9	6,355	13·0
Hertfordshire	17,240	24·2	6,431	9·7
Humberside	10,135	16·5	5,524	8·4
Isle of Wight	1,753	29·5	1,085	11·4
Kent	40,142	36·8	6,828	7·0
Lancashire	41,735	38·6	8,446	9·9
Leicestershire	13,422	19·5	1,323	2·3
Lincolnshire	17,091	39·7	3,073	8·6
Norfolk	12,049	21·8	2,295	5·5
North Yorkshire	11,161	23·2	5,063	11·6
Northamptonshire	10,243	24·2	3,335	8·2

	Primary[1]		Secondary[1]	
	Pupils	per cent.	Pupils	per cent.
Northumberland	7,340	40·0	2,339	9·3
Nottinghamshire	7,611	10·7	3,419	5·6
Oxfordshire	8,212	24·3	2,488	7·6
Shropshire	5,389	18·4	2,356	8·6
Somerset	10,582	34·5	3,267	11·5
Staffordshire	17,290	23·4	8,987	12·4
Suffolk	6,042	15·5	2,485	5·9
Surrey	13,935	21·1	4,338	9·6
Warwickshire	11,019	28·9	2,412	9·2
West Sussex	11,914	26·0	4,709	11·8
Wiltshire	8,593	21·9	3,048	8·7
England	848,960	24·8	243,230	8·3

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed.
[2] There were no classes with over 30 pupils in the Isles of Scilly in either primary or secondary schools.

Child Care

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what child care provision his Department provides for pre-school age children of the Department's employees; what child care provision for school holiday and/or after-school care is provided for employees' children aged five and over; what plans there are for increasing provision in the next five years; and how these are to be funded.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department does not currently provide child care provision for employees' children. There are no firm proposals for making such provision during the next five years, although the possibility of providing creche facilities for the Department's Darlington office is under consideration.

Computing (Women Students)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will take steps to counter the decline in the numbers of women studying computing at universities and polytechnics.

Mr. Jackson: The overall number of women starting computing courses at universities and polytechnics has increased over the past five years.

The figures are:

Female enrolments on computing courses

	Polytechnics[1] in England (full-time equivalent)	Universities[2] in the United Kingdom (full-time)
1982	496	412
1983	589	381
1984	557	342
1985	688	363
1986	785	367

[1] All advanced courses in computing.
[2] Full-time courses for first degrees or diplomas.

Education Reform

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish his proposals for the programme of education support grants in 1989-90.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have written to the local authority associations proposing expenditure of £125·5 million on the programme next year. Some £48·5 million of this will be for the continuing support of projects begun in earlier years, and £77 million will be for new and extended activities. The purposes for which I propose to pay grant are set out in the table. My main priority in drawing up these proposals has been to reflect the priorities of the Education Reform Bill now before Parliament. £35 million of the new expenditure would be devoted to activities relating to financial delegation, including over £5 million for training governors in schools and colleges. I propose to make some £30 million of support available in areas relating to the introduction of the national curriculum, including £10 million for information technology equipment as well as almost £9 million earmarked for science and English.

I also intend to make £9 million available for adult literacy and educational guidance programmes, open learning and the training of youth leaders for the inner cities. There will be further funding for advanced computer-aided engineering equipment.

I believe that this programme will help local education authorities introduce the national curriculum and the wide-ranging changes in the management of schools and colleges proposed in the Education Reform Bill.

Annex A

Proposals for the ESG programme in England in 1989-90
Activities with New Starts in 1989-90

	Expenditure in 1989-90 cash	Total in new starts plus committed	Rate of Grant
NEW ACTIVITIES			
Financial Delegation to Schools			
1. Financial Delegation to Schools	25·0	25·0	70

	Expenditure in 1989-90 cash	Total in new starts plus committed	Rate of Grant
2. Financial Delegation to Colleges	1·2	1·2	70
3. Training for School Governors	4·9	4·9	70
4. Training for FE College Governors	0·2	0·2	70
National Curriculum Related			
5. LEA Inspection	1·9	1·9	70
6. National Curriculum	10·0	10·0	70
7. English in the Curriculum	4·8	4·8	70
Social Responsibility and Inner Cities			
8. Youth Leaders for the Inner Cities	2·4	2·4	70
9. Establishment of Adult Literacy Centres	3·0	3·0	70
10. Improvement and expansion of Educational Guidance for Adults	2·0	2·0	70
EXTENSIONS			
Financial Delegation-Related			
11. Management Information Systems in FE	3·5	6·8	70
National Curriculum-Related			
12. IT in Schools—expansion of hardware scheme	10·0	20·9	[1]50/70
13. Science and Technology in Primary Schools	4·0	10·9	50
Social Responsibility and Inner Cities			
14. Open Learning	1·7	3·0	70
15. Computer Aided Engineering	2·3	2·3	70
Activities Continuing without New Starts			
16. Action to combat misuse of drugs	—	0·3	70
17. Maths in Schools	—	8·3	50
18. Improving the Quality of Education in Rural Primary Schools	—	1·5	70
19. Improving the Quality of Education in Urban Primary Schools	—	0·4	70
20. Education for a Multi-Ethnic Society	—	2·7	70
21. PICKUP	—	0·2	70
22. IT in Non-Advanced FE	—	4·6	70
23. Education for the Unemployed	—	0·4	70
24. Support for Parents of Children under 5 with Severe Learning Difficulties	—	1·9	70
25. Pilot projects to develop the use of the spoken word	—	0·3	70
26. Promotion of social responsibility in young people	—	1·3	70
27. Pilot project to develop Records of Achievement	—	1·2	50
28. Diversification of First Foreign Language in Schools	—	0·5	70
29. Learning by Achievement for 14-21 year olds	—	2·1	70
30. School teacher and lecturer appraisal	—	0·5	70
Totals	76·9	125·5	

[1] It is proposed that grant should be paid at 50 per cent. on the second tranche of expenditure and at 70 per cent. on commitments arising from 1988-89.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

El Salvador

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his assessment of the level of human rights abuses in El Salvador including those by both Government and non-Government agencies.

Mr. Eggar: We share the view of the United Nations Special Representative in his latest report that the human rights situation in El Salvador has continued to improve, although there is still room for further progress. We are concerned about the abuses noted by the Special Representative on the part of the guerrillas, including indiscriminate use of land mines, summary executions and kidnappings.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his latest assessment of the presence of oil reserves near the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Eggar: Studies undertaken by companies in the petroleum industry have been inconclusive.

Child Care

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what child care provision his Department provides for pre-school age children of the Department's employees; what child care provision for school holiday and/or after school care is

provided for employees' children aged five and over; what plans there are for increasing provision in the next five years; and how these are to be funded.

Mrs. Chalker: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has no child care provision at present, either for the pre-school age group or for those aged five and over.

There is a proposal to provide child care facilities for the pre-school age group and/or a holiday play scheme. Both would be user-funded.

Government Communications Bureau

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the role and function of the Government Communications Bureau; when it was created; what has been its annual budget for each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The Government Communications Bureau was founded shortly after world war II. It is a non-departmental body advising on international communications systems principally for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Ministry of Defence. It does not have a separate budget.

United Nations Council for Namibia

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any information concerning the total cost of the United Nations Council for Namibia conference held in Istanbul on 21 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: No.

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will outline any representations which he has made to the United Nations concerning the activities of the United Nations Council for Namibia.

Mrs. Chalker: We have made no representations about the United Nations Council for Namibia. However, at the last session of the General Assembly we made it plain that we remained concerned at the continued financial extravagance of some of the activities of the Council for Namibia.

Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any Soviet inspectors have yet been permitted access to the United States cruise missile sites at Royal Air Force Molesworth and Royal Air Force Greenham Common for the purposes of verification under the intermediate nuclear forces treaty.

Mr. Mellor: No.

South Africa (Submarines)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom is party to *(a)* any United Nations agreement or *(b)* European Economic Community agreement prohibiting the provision of blueprints, materials or hardware for submarines to the Republic of South Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: We adhere strictly to

(a) Security Council resolution 418 of 1977, which embodies the United Nations arms embargo against South Africa; and

(b) the agreement reached by Foreign Ministers of the European Community in September 1985 to refuse to co-operate with South Africa in the military sphere and on a rigorously controlled embargo on exports of arms to that country.

We would therefore not permit British companies to supply blueprints, materials or hardware for submarines to South Africa.

Russia—PLO Meeting

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what report he has received from Her Majesty's ambassador in Moscow regarding the recent meeting between Mr. Gorbachev and Mr. Yasser Arafat; and whether the ambassador has been able to substantiate, through contact with the Soviet Foreign Ministry, the report in *Tass* that Mr. Gorbachev asked the Palestine Liberation Organisation to recognise the state of Israel.

Mr. Mellor: It is not clear whether the welcome remarks which Mr. Gorbachev is reported as having made concerning recognition of the state of Israel were, in fact, directed at the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

Mr. Jack Lewis-Walker

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made by his Department to the Government of Zimbabwe about the imprisonment without trail of Mr. Jack Lewis-Walker, about whom the hon. Member for Macclesfield has written to him; and on what date he expects to be able to announce that Mr. Lewis-Walker has been released.

Mr. Eggar: I have not yet received any letter from my hon. Friend on this subject, although I received letters from other hon. Members with constituency interests.

The British high commission at Harare is in touch with the authorities in Zimbabwe and has been granted consular access to Mr. Lewis-Walker, who is detained under the emergency powers regulations.

We cannot speculate when Mr. Lewis-Walker may be released. This is a matter for the Zimbabwe authorities. The British high commission has made formal representations to try to secure his release on the basis that this has been recommended by the review tribunal.

SOCIAL SERVICES

NHS Staff

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the numerised and percentage increases or decreases in the following categories of National Health Service hospital service manpower since 1973-74 *(a)* nursery and midwifery, *(b)* ancillary, *(c)* medical and dental and *(d)* administrative and clerical.

Mr. Newton: Such information as is available for England is shown in the tables.

Staffing figures have been given *(a)* for all hospital and community staff and *(b)* for hospital nursing and midwifery staff and medical and dental staff. (These are the only two staff groups that can be split between those working in the community and in hospitals).

NHS Staff in Post England 30 September

Whole-time equivalents[1]

	1973	*1986*	*Change 1973-86 WTE Change*	*Percentage Change*
Nursing and Midwifery[2,3]	308,500	402,700	94,200	+30·5
Ancillary[4]	165,100	124,300	−40,900	−24·7
Medical and Dental[5]	32,300	43,200	10,900	+33·8
Administration and Clerical[6]	77,100	111,400	34,200	+44·4

Source: DHSS annual censuses of NHS medical and non-medical manpower.
[1] Figures are independently rounded to the nearest (100) hundred whole-time equivalents. Percentages are calculated on unrounded figures.
[2] Not adjusted for reduction in nurses working hours during 1980-81 (from 40 to 37·5 hours per week).
[3] Includes agency staff.
[4] Not adjusted for transfer of Operating Theatre Assistants from Ancillary to Professional and Technical Staff group on 1 April 1984.
[5] Includes permanent paid, honorary and locum staff.
[6] Clinically related staff = 35,900, non-clinically related staff = 75,400 (Difference in total due to rounding).
General Note: Figures for 1973 and 1986 are not consistent due to the effects of the 1974 NHS reorganisation.

NHS Hospital Staff in Post England 30 September

	Whole time equivalents[1]		*Change 1973 to 1986*[1]	
	1973	*1986*	*WTE*	*Percentage*
Nursing and Midwifery[2,3,4]	266,400	334,700	68,300	+33·2
Medical and Dental[5]	28,300	38,800	10,500	+37·2

Source: DHSS (SR7) annual censuses of NHS medical and non-medical manpower.
Notes:
[1] Figures are independently rounded to nearest one hundred (100) whole-time equivalents. Changes calculated on unrounded figures.
[2] Because of the 1974 NHS reorganisation, which involved definition and classification changes, figures for 1973 are not consistent with those for 1986.
[3] Includes agency staff.
[4] Not adjusted for reduction in nurses working hours (from 40 to 37·5 per week) during 1980-81.
[5] Includes permanent paid, honorary and locum staff. Locum staff for 1973 are estimated.

Solvent Abuse

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how much has been spent by Her Majesty's Government in each year since 1980 *(a)* directly and *(b)* through grants to non-Government organisations, on education measures to reduce solvent abuse.

Mrs. Currie: The Government have directly spent the following sums on specific education and information measures designed to inform young people, parents, professional workers and retailers about the problems of solvent misuse.

	Direct Expenditure £	*Via Voluntary Agencies* £
1980-81	—	—
1981-82	—	1,100
1982-83	—	1,000
1983-84	10,000	—
1984-85	10,000	28,667
1985-86	—	33,600
1986-87	—	55,200
1987-88	—	34,333
	20,000	163,900

Total £183,900

The Government have also funded drug education co-ordinators in every local education authority, whose work has included activities aimed at preventing solvent misuse; have funded the Health Education Authority which (as the Health Education Council) produced a leaflet on solvent misuse; and have invested in a major expansion of drug misuse services, some of which offer help to solvent misusers.

NHS Property (Kettering)

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all National Health Service property within the Kettering district health authority area, stating acreage and current open market valuation.

Mrs. Currie: A list of NHS property, and acreage, within Kettering district health authority is as follows. Information on the current open market valuation is not readily available and to obtain it would involve disproportionate cost. Disclosure of the open market value may also be prejudicial to any future sale of this property.

Property	*Acreage*
Mayfair Day Hospital: 32-34 Headlands, Kettering	0·2710
Redcliffe Day Hospital, 49-51 Hatton Park Road, Wellingborough	0·4600
Stockburn Mein Home, Southlands, Kettering	0·7380
Ambulance Station, Forest Gate Road, Corby	0·2440
St. Mary's Hospital, London Road, Kettering	11·5840
Corby Health Complex, Cottingham Road, Corby, Community Hospital and Health Centre	14·1600
Isebrook Hospital, Irthlingborough Road, Wellingborough	11·5560
Hardwick Park Health Centre, Olympic Way, Wellingborough	0·6120
Health Clinic, British Lane/School Lane, Kettering	0·2500
Health Clinic, Stuart Road, Corby	0·3440
Health Centre, High Street, Burton Latimer	0·2800
18a Oxford Street, Wellingborough	0·1160
150 Rothwell Road, Kettering	0·0810
142 Rothwell Road, Kettering	0·1060
140 Rothwell Road, Kettering	0·1090
126 Rothwell Road, Kettering	0·3720
Kettering General Hospital, Rothwell Road, Kettering (includes Ambulance Station)	37·9920
247, 249 Stamford Road, Kettering	0·1800
123 Headlands, Kettering	0·1650
Health Centre, Bridge Street, Rothwell	0·5000

Property	*Acreage*
Health Clinic, Sharman Road, Wellingborough	0·8480
Health Centre, Regent Street, Finedon	0·1900
Health Centre, School Lane, Chester	0·1560
114 Rothwell Road, Kettering	0·1150
156 Rothwell Road, Kettering	0·0700
154 Rothwell Road, Kettering	0·0820
152 Rothwell Road, Kettering	0·0790
8 Queensberry Road, Kettering	0·1150
10 Legion Crescent, Kettering	0·0790
Rushden Hospital	17·7625
Rushden Memorial Clinic	0·9820
Health Clinic, Rectory Road, Rushden	0·4310
Land at Admitt Road, Rushden	0·1350
Ambulance Station, Glapthorne Road, Oundle	0·2500
Ambulance Station, Station Road, Rushden	0·2110

Housing Benefit

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will indicate his latest estimates of the numbers of persons gaining and losing as a result of social security changes coming into effect in April, in the following categories *(a)* those affected by the abolition of housing benefit supplement, *(b)* those affected by the reductions in housing benefit related to amenity charges paid to landlords and *(c)* those affected by the increase in housing benefit non-dependant deductions.

Mr. Portillo: I regret that data are not available in the form requested. Available information is contained in "The Impact of the Reformed Structure of Income-Related Benefits." These tables allow for the effect of the abolition of housing benefit supplement, but not for the change to the structure of non-dependant deductions. The tables make no allowances for changes to the support received under the former housing benefit scheme by those people on supplementary benefit who were paying for their fuel with their rent—around 90,000 claimants. This help is being phased out over the next five years.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the percentage loss in income in *(a)* Burnley and *(b)* Pendle due to housing benefit reductions of those earning (i) £60 per week, (ii) £80 per week and (iii) £150 per week.

Mr. Portillo: I regret that the information is not available.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will list the local government housing authorities which failed to convert their housing benefit regulations in line with the Social Security Act 1986 by the designated time;

(2) if he will investigate those housing authorities which failed to convert their housing benefit regulations in line with the Social Security Act 1986 by the designated time and deposit his findings in the Library.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the local authority housing departments which have failed to convert all their housing benefit claimants' cases from the old system to the new, as defined by the Social Security Act 1986, by the due date of 4 April; and what percentage of claimants for each authority had not been notified of their precise entitlements by that date.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services which local authorities had housing benefit systems in operation in time for the start of the new housing benefit scheme on 1 April.

Mr. Portillo: I regret that the information requested is not held centrally.

Cochlea Implants

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average cost of a cochlea implant; how many such operations have been performed under the National Health Service in the most recent 12-month period; what steps have been taken to evaluate the effectiveness of the operation; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: Implantation of cochlea stimulation devices is undertaken at University College hospital, London, from non-National Health Service funds and with support from the National Institute of the Deaf. There are also research programmes at other National Health Service hospitals. Cochlea implants are still at a research and development stage and it is for health authorities to decide whether and when to make them generally available, taking into account medical advice as to benefits for patients and results of research and evaluation. Cost estimates vary according to the type of device from about £6,000 to £10,000 per patient.

AIDS

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether any medical research relating to AIDS being undertaken on chimpanzees is financed by the European Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Under its fourth medical and health research programme the European Community contributes to the funding of a breeding colony of chimpanzees in the Netherlands. It is proposed that 20 animals should be used in AIDS research to the end of 1991.

Social Security Appeals (Carlisle)

Mr. Marlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many social security appeals were made by claimants who live in Carlisle city in the years 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986 and 1987; and what percentage of these claimants were represented during the appeals.

Mr. Portillo: The table gives the available information. The national administrative statistics for social security appeal tribunals are not disaggregated for areas smaller than a social security region and the figures relate to the north-western region, which includes Carlisle city. Equivalent information is not available prior to April 1984.

Social security appeal tribunal statistics are now published annually in "Social Security Statistics". The 1986 edition contains information on social security tribunal statistics from April 1984 to December 1986 while the 1987 edition contains information from January 1986 to December 1986.

Social security appeals in north-western region 1984 to 1987

Year	(1) Number of appeals lodged	(2) Number of appeals heard	Number attended by the appellant (3) Total number	(4) As percentage of column (2)	Number where the appellant was represented (5) Total number	(6) As percentage of column (2)
1984[1]	30,686	12,125	6,997	57·7	2,745	22·6
1985	38,777	19,631	10,888	55·5	4,261	21·7
1986	42,584	18,167	9,864	54·3	3,849	21·2
1987[2]	23,367	11,821	6,193	52·4	2,450	20·7

[1] April to December.
[2] January to June.

Maternity Grants

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women claimed maternity grants in the last year of availability in Blyth Valley; and what is his best estimate of the number of women who will receive social fund payments for maternity in the first year of availability.

Mr. Portillo: The figures requested (for Blyth local office area) are as follows:

	Number
Maternity grant claims (15 April 1986-13 April 1987):	1,281
Social fund maternity payments (6 April 1987-8 April 1988):	353

Death Grants

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many death grants were claimed in Blyth Valley last year; and how many were awarded.

Mr. Portillo: Death grants ceased with the introduction of the social fund funeral payments in April 1987.

During the last year of availability (9 April 1986 to 6 April 1987) 1,094 death grants were claimed at Blyth local office. Figures on the number of payments made are not available.

In the first year of operation (7 April 1987 to 8 April 1988) 97 claims to social fund funeral payments resulted in 59 payments.

Free School Meals

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services which pupils will be entitled to free school meals in the Northumberland education authority currently on supplementary benefit; and what is his estimate of the number of pupils on the new family credit scheme and income support who will be entitled to free meals.

Mr. Portillo: In October 1987, (the latest date for which information is available) there were 5,863 children receiving free school meals in the Northumberland education authority area on account of their family's receipt of supplementary benefit. We estimate that a similar number are now entitled on account of receipt of income support. Children from families in receipt of family credit are not entitled to free school meals. Instead, provision is made in cash by including an additional amount of £2·55 in the child credit rates for each child for each week of the year.

Haringey Health Authority

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the number of hospital beds available in the Haringey health authority area on the latest available date, and for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Currie: The requested information is given in the table.

Average Daily Number of Available Beds, Haringey District Health Authority[1], 1979-1986

Year	Average daily number of available beds
1979	1,236
1980	1,122
1981	1,143
1982	1,157
1983	1,109
1984	1,028
1985	986
1986	1,072

[1] Haringey district prior to 1982.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the number of people on hospital waiting lists in the Haringey health authority area on the latest available date; and what are corresponding figures for each year since 1979.

Mr. Newton: The requested information is given in the table.

Number of patients on in-patient waiting list at 31 March, Haringey District Health Authority[1], 1979-87.

Year	Total cases
1979	2,063
1980	1,721
1981	1,602
1982	1,710
1983	1,456
1984	1,108
1985	1,208
1986	1,225
1987	1,804

[1] Haringey district prior to 1982.

Industrial Death Benefit

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on his Department's decision to withdraw the industrial death benefit of those widows receiving it whose husbands died before 11 April.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Members for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) on 18 April 1988 at columns *344-45*.

Social Fund

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the formula which determined the allocation of social fund grants and loans to local offices, what was the expenditure on single payments for each office in the period used for assessment under the formula; what that figure is as a percentage of the national total; and what the social fund loan and grants allocations to each office for 1988-89 were as a percentage of the national total.

Mr. Scott: A note explaining the basis of the allocation of the social fund budgets for 1988-89 has been in the Library since December. For information on single payment expenditure for the 32-week period ending 7 April 1987, I refer the hon. Member to my hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) on 18 February at column *701*. Social fund allocations were announced in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) on 4 November 1987 at columns *774-81*.

Abortion

Mr. Duffy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the total number of abortions, under the terms of the Abortion Act 1967, in the Sheffield health authority area for each of the last seven years for which figures are available; how many of these abortions were performed on ground 4 where there is a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped; and how many of these abortions were performed on ground 5 to save the life of the pregnant woman.

Mr. Newton: The information requested is given in the table.

Notifications of abortions carried out under the Abortion Act 1967 to usual residents of Sheffield health areas, by selected grounds 1980-1986

Area of usual residence	*All grounds*	*Ground 4*	*Ground 5*
Sheffield area health authority			
1980	1,299	16	—
1981	1,317	22	—
1982	1,322	21	—
Sheffield district health authority			
1983	1,308	22	—
1984	1,398	29	—
1985	1,402	17	—
1986	1,486	10	—

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations his Department has received from the Disablement Income Group with reference to the decision not to disregard savings of mobility allowance for the purchase of a car in evaluating capital and entitlement to income support; when they were received; what action has been taken; what reply he is sending; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Mr. Peter Large of the Disablement Income Group wrote to me on 27 February on this subject. I shall reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations his Department has received from the joint committee on mobility for the disabled with reference to the decision not to disregard savings of mobility allowance for the purchase of a car in evaluating capital and entitlement to income support; when they were received; what action has been taken; what reply he is sending; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: No representation has been received from the joint committee on mobility for the disabled.

THE ARTS

Child Care

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Minister for the Arts what child care provision his Office provides for pre-school age children of the Office's employees; what child care provision for school holiday and/or after-school care is provided for employees' children aged five and over; what plans there are for increasing provision in the next five years; and how these are to be funded.

Mr. Luce: At present no child care provision is provided by the Office of Arts and Libraries for employees' children.

There are no plans to introduce such facilities in the next five years.

Museums and Galleries

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts (1) whether he has figures updated from the 1980 Department of Education and Science review of the Victoria and Albert museum conservation department for *(a)* the proportion of 16th to 20th century miniatures which now require conservation; *(b)* how many 16th to 20th century miniatures now require major treatment; *(c)* how many objects in the prints and drawings departments now require urgent treatment and *(d)* how many items in the reserve collection of tapestries are now decaying;

(2) what have been the receipts from the sale of Army objects in the collections of *(a)* the British museum and *(b)* the Victoria and Albert museums in each of the past 10 years;

(3) whether the Clore gallery at the Tate gallery has a computerised alarm system; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what he estimates would be the cost of introducing computerised alarm systems at *(a)* the Tate gallery and *(b)* the Victoria and Albert museums;

(5) whether the collections in *(a)* the Tate gallery, *(b)* the British museum and *(c)* the Victoria and Albert museum are insured; and if he will make a statement;

(6) whether, pursuant to paragraphs 4.17 of the National Audit Office report "The Management of English Museums", he will name the collection of manuscripts in the Victoria and Albert museum's national

art library which, according to that report, is in a distressing condition with widespread deterioration of paper and bindings; and what is its estimated value;

(7) whether he will list the off-site storage locations of *(a)* the British museum and *(b)* the Victoria and Albert museum and indicate (i) which are devoted solely to storage and (ii) the storage space of each in square metres;

(8) what estimates he has of the cost of installing *(a)* temperature controls, *(b)* humidity controls and *(c)* an air filteration system for the storage of the British museum's prints and drawings department;

(9) how many duplicates of objects are in the collections of *(a)* the British museum and *(b)* the Victoria and Albert museum;

(10) how many objects in the collections of *(a)* the British museum *(b)* the Victoria and Albert museum have become useless for the purposes of the collection over the past 10 years by reason of *(a)* damage, *(b)* deterioration or *(c)* infestation;

(11) whether, pursuant to paragraphs 2-4 of the National Audit Office report, "The Management of National Museums" he will list the potential acquisitions which have been rejected by *(a)* the Tate gallery, *(b)* the British museum and *(c)* the Victoria and Albert museum in each of the last five years on the grounds of consequential resource costs;

(12) how many objects in the collection of *(a)* the British museum and *(b)* the Victoria and Albert museum have been (i) given away, (ii) sold or (iii) transferred to other museums and galleries, over the past 10 years; and whether he will list all such objects whose value is greater than £1,000;

(13) how many professional and qualified staff were employed in conservation at *(a)* the Tate gallery, *(b)* the British museum and *(c)* the Victoria and Albert museum in (i) 1977 and (ii) 1987;

(14) what information is available to his Department, pursuant to paragraph 1.10 of the National Audit Office report, "Management of National Museums", Cm. 394, to make it possible to identify areas where action is most urgently required at *(a)* the Tate gallery, *(b)* the British museum and *(c)* the Victoria and Albert museum;

(15) how many objects are in the collection of *(a)* the British museum and *(b)* the Victoria and Albert museum.

Mr. Luce: I shall write to the hon. Member and will place copies of my letter in the Library of the House.

EMPLOYMENT

Industrial Tribunals (Appeals)

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many appeals to industrial tribunals were made by workers living in the city of Carlisle in the years 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986 and 1987; and what percentage of those workers were represented during the tribunal hearings.

Mr. Nicholls: The relevant statistics for residents within the Carlisle postal district are as follows:

	Number of complaints heard by industrial tribunals	*Per cent of applicants represented at hearings*
1983	21	48
1984	19	58
1985	68	99
1986	8	75
1987	15	80

Mr. Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will introduce legislation to require claims for unfair dismissal to be made in writing to industrial tribunals and to be made available to the employers against whom complaint is made before the hearing.

Mr. Nicholls: The industrial tribunal rules of procedure already require this to be done.

Mr. Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will introduce legislation to require claimants who fail in their applications to industrial tribunals for unfair dismissal to bear their own costs.

Mr. Nicholls: Parties to unfair dismissal cases generally bear their own costs, though under their rules of procedure industrial tribunals may order a party who has acted frivolously, vexatiously or otherwise unreasonably to pay the costs of the other party.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what the actual and percentage changes in employment for the years 1977 and 1987 were in (i) Yorkshire and Humberside and (ii) Don Valley constituency in the following main industry groups: *(a)* mining, *(b)* manufacturing, *(c)* construction, *(d)* distribution and leisure, *(e)* financial services and *(f)* public and other services.

Mr. Lee: The available information is as follows:

Employees in Employment in Yorkshire and Humberside Region Changes in the levels of employment between June 1977 and June 1987

	Numbers	*Percentages*
Manufacturing	−273,000	−37·9
Construction	−16,000	−15·2
Wholesale distribution, hotels and catering	56,000	34·6
Retail distribution	−6,000	−3·4
Banking, insurance and finance	57,000	64·0
Public administration and defence	−1,000	−0·8
Education, health and other services	59,000	17·4

The available employee estimates for parliamentary constituencies are from censuses of employment taken in September 1981 and September 1984. An industry breakdown is not available for the earlier year, but, overall, the estimated number of employees in employment in the Don Valley constituency showed a reduction of 2,700, or 12 per cent., between the two census dates.

Mr. Tony Lloyd To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give for each standard region the most recent figures which are available showing the annual change in (i) the number of employees in employment and (ii) the number of full-time equivalent employees in employment.

Mr. Lee: There is insufficient detail in the quarterly employment estimates to form the basis of a calculation of a full-time equivalent series. The available information is as follows:

Employees in employment
Changes in the levels of employment between December 1986 and December 1987

Thousands

	Males	*Females*		*All*
	All	*All*	*Part time*	*employees*
South East	40	107	40	149
East Anglia	19	17	9	35
South West	1	17	8	17
West Midlands	11	32	21	43
East Midlands	13	20	7	33
Yorkshire and Humberside	5	18	10	22
North West	−7	12	11	4
North	4	10	7	13
Wales	1	7	2	8
Scotland	−10	14	14	4

The labour force survey provides information on a different basis from which can be calculated the person hours usually worked by employees. The changes between spring 1986 and spring 1987 are shown in the following table.

Increase between spring 1986 and spring 1987 in person hours usually worked by employees

	Thousand person hours per week	*Per cent.*
South East	154	0·1
East Anglia	223	0·8
South West	2,064	3·4
West Midlands	−1,379	−1·9
East Midlands	−838	−1·5
Yorkshire and Humberside	332	0·5
North West	1,882	2·2
North	830	2·1
Wales	51	0·1
Scotland	−516	−0·7

Mr. Mans To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the rate of change in unemployment levels in the last 12 months in the north-west.

Mr. Lee: On 10 March 1988 the number of unemployed claimants in the north-west region, seasonally adjusted and excluding school leavers was 347,800, a fall of 15·8 per cent. since March 1987.

Termination of Employment

Mr. Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will introduce legislation to require employers to provide dismissed employees with reasons in writing for the termination of their employment.

Mr. Nicholls: Section 53 of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 gives an employee the right, subject to certain qualifying conditions, to be provided with a written statement giving particulars of the reasons for dismissal.

Race and Sex Monitoring

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will institute an inquiry to seek detailed information on the full extent of race and sex monitoring in the workplace.

Mr. Nicholls: No. To institute such an inquiry would have considerable resource implications and impose additional burdens on employers.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many and what percentage of the 374 major private sector employers visited by the Department of Employment's race relations advisory service *(a)* have introduced ethnic monitoring and *(b)* are actively considering the introduction of ethnic monitoring; and if he will place a list of such employers in the Library.

Mr. Nicholls: Of the 374 major private sector employers visited in the period April 1985 to December 1987, 79 had introduced ethnic monitoring and 47 were actively considering the introduction of ethnic monitoring. I cannot place a list of these employers in the Library for the reasons I gave to the hon. Member in my reply of 18 April 1988, at column *319*.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will issue a circular to major employers in the private sector, requesting them to comply with the codes of the Commission for Racial Equality and of the Equal Opportunities Commission, in respect of monitoring and positive action.

Mr. Nicholls: An initiative of this kind would be more appropriate for the commissions to undertake. The Government encourage the adoption of the recommendations in the CRE and EOC codes of practice, including those relating to monitoring and positive action. This Department's race relations employment advisory service is at the present time giving particular publicity to the positive action provisions within the Race Relations Act and is encouraging employers to use them whenever appropriate. It will also be supporting the CRE's forthcoming campaign to promote its code of practice.

Race and Sex Monitoring

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) by whom the research project will shortly be commissioned to investigate the benefits that accrue from the introduction of ethnic monitoring systems by employers; by whom the project will be carried out; how long the project will take; how much it will cost; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether he will commission a research project to investigate the benefits that accrue from the introduction of sex monitoring systems by employers.

Mr. Nicholls: The research project to investigate the benefits of ethnic monitoring systems will be commissioned by my Department. It will be carried out by an independent university-based research team, will take one year, and will cost up to £40,000

The research project to investigate the benefits of ethnic monitoring should also throw some light on those that accrue from sex monitoring. It would therefore be premature to consider further research on sex monitoring until the current project has been reported.

Child Care

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what child care provision his Department provides for pre-school age children of the Department's employees; what child care provision for school holiday and/or after-school care is provided for employees' children aged five and over; what plans there are for increasing provision in the next five years; and how these are to be funded.

Mr. Lee: In the Department of Employment group a care-parent scheme operates for staff with children under five years old at the Health and Safety Executive headquarters in Bootle. Holiday play schemes, for employees' children aged five years and over, operate in the Department of Employment's headquarters at Runcorn, the Manpower Services Commission headquarters at Sheffield and the Health and Safety Executive headquarters in London. Additionally, we participate in two interdepartmental holiday play schemes in Bootle and Edinburgh. Several initiatives are under consideration or are proposed. These include the provision of creche facilities, at the Department of Employment in Runcorn and at the Health and Safety Executive in Bootle; also a care-parent scheme for Manpower Services Commission staff at Sheffield and an interdepartmental holiday play scheme in London (SW1). As regards plans to increase provision in the next five years, the Department will continue to consider sympathetically proposals for day care and holiday play schemes and, where possible, will provide practical help where there is evidence of sufficient demand to make it financially viable. The Department may be able to offer initial financial support to new daycare schemes but they must be viable without a continuing subsidy.

Former Chemical Factory, Ilford

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the Health and Safety Inspectorate last visited the site of a former chemical factory in Uphall road, Ilford; what were the results of its monitoring ; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Inspectors of the Health and Safety Executive last visited this site on 1st March 1988 to meet the prospective developers of the site and discuss their plans for development. No monitoring of the site was carried out by the Health and Safety Executive during the visit.

Member's Correspondence

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will now reply to the letter sent to him on 3 February by the hon. Member for Gower in relation to a constituent residing in Llanmadoc, Gower.

Mr. Lee: I have now written to the hon. Member.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Potatoes

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the market support prices for potatoes to apply in Northern Ireland for the 1988-89 crop year beginning on 1 July have been determined; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers: Yes, following consultation with the Ulster Farmers Union it has been decided that the support price for the 1988 ware potato crop should remain at the level which applied to the 1987 crop, namely £46 per tonne. Any support operation will be limited to a maximum of 60,000 tonnes and as previously announced the target area for Northern Ireland planting in 1988 is 12,500 hectares.

I believe that these arrangements will provide growers with a reasonable degree of assistance should it be necessary to introduce potato market support measures. I would, however, hope that support measures will not be necessary and I look to producers to make a positive contribution to market equilibrium by avoiding over-planting.

China (Trade Delegation)

Sir John Biggs-Davison: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the Northern Ireland trade delegation to China.

Mr. Viggers *[holding reply 14 April 1988]:* I visited China from 20-31 March with a trade delegation comprising representatives of eight Northern Ireland companies. The delegation, which was organised and supported by the Industrial Development Board, visited Shanghai, Tianjin and Beijing.

The companies representatives visited a large number of potential customers and orders have been secured as a result of contacts made. I also met a number of organisations interested in investing outside China and these discussions have already led to a follow-up visit by a major Chinese clothing manufacturer to Northern Ireland.

School Assemblies

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his policy towards the holding during school assemblies, of public signings of pledges as part of campaigns organised by bodies which do not recognise or support the role of the security forces in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding reply 15 April 1988]:* This is primarily a matter for school authorities operating within existing legislation. I am not aware of any campaign in schools being organised by bodies opposed to the security forces.

SCOTLAND

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the privatisation of the electricity industry in Scotland will require any minimum level of electricity generation by non-nuclear plant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The Government have no such proposals in mind.

Low-alcohol Lager

Mr. Michael Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he will take to prevent licensed grocers from selling low-alcohol lager to children under 18 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The sale of any beverage which in strength exceeds 1·2 per cent. of ethyl alcohol to children under the age of 18 years is an offence under the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976. Anyone possessing evidence of such an offence should bring the matter to the attention of the police.

Child Care

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration is being given by him to the EEC resolution on child care.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I assume the hon. Member is referring to the resolution on child care infrastructures adopted by the European Parliament at its session on 10 March 1986 and published subsequently in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*. Such resolutions are not binding on member states.

Scottish Ferry Companies

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the level of subsidy paid to the Scottish ferry companies expressed per head of the population in the islands for the last five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The figures requested are as follows:

	£
1983-84	95·41
1984-85	100·91
1985-86	106·42
1986-87	102·75
1987-88	[1]90·82

[1] Estimate.

The subsidies are the deficit subsidies paid to Caledonian MacBrayne and the Orkney Islands Shipping Company (OISC) and the fare subsidies payments made to P and O Ferries. Payments to OISC ended in 1986-87 when responsibility for support was transferred to the Orkney Islands council. This figure was £1·0 million in the final year. The population figures are from the 1981 census for Orkney, Shetland, the Outer and Inner Hebrides and islands in the Clyde.

Torness Power Station

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest estimate of the rate of return to be obtained by the South of Scotland electricity board and the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board currently and after completion of the Torness power station.

Mr. Lang: In 1986-87, the latest year for which figures were available, the current cost rate of return on net assets employed achieved jointly by the Scottish electricity boards was 2·8 per cent. The agreed financial target for 1987-88 is 2·7 per cent. and for 1988-89 is 2·8 per cent. The rate of return for the period beyond 1988-89 is still to be discussed.

Torness power station is expected to start supplying the grid in the course of this year and should be fully commissioned by the early 1990s.

Courts Administration

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people have been employed by the Scottish courts administration in the last five years for which information is available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of staff in terms of full-time equivalents employed by the Scottish courts administration at 1 April in each of the last five years was as follows:

Year	*Number*
1 April 1984	880
1 April 1985	882½
1 April 1986	868½
1 April 1987	869
1 April 1988	872½

District Courts

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by court the number of criminal cases dealt with in the district courts in Scotland in the last five years for which information is available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to my reply given to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) on Monday 18 January 1988, at column *518*.

Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the establishment of the Crown Office and procurator fiscal service in Scotland; and how many people have been employed in each of the last five years for which information is available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The numbers of staff who are and have been employed in the Crown Office and procurator fiscal service, on 1 April each year, are as follows:

Year	*Staff*
1988	1,007
1987	981
1986	956
1985	968
1984	942
1983	927

Air Pollution

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the dangers that can be caused by the discharge of an excessive level of sulphur dioxide into the atmosphere over Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Emissions of sulphur dioxide from Scottish sources amount to less than 5 per cent. of United Kingdom emissions. There is no evidence that current levels of SO_2 in the atmosphere are having any direct effect on human, animal or plant health, but SO_2 emissions can contribute to the acidification of

freshwaters. A considerable monitoring and research programme, with substantial Government funding, is being undertaken in Scotland to assess the levels and effects of deposition.

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the dangers that can be caused by the discharge of an excessive level of heavy metals into the atmosphere over Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There is no evidence that current levels of heavy metals discharged into the atmosphere in Scotland are having any effect on human, animal, fish or plant health.

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment is made by his Department of the level of heavy metals discharged into the atmosphere over Scotland annually from the burning of fossil fuels by electricity generating stations in England and Wales; what are the levels for the remaining discharge of heavy metals; and what is treated as a safe level.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Assessments of the concentrations of heavy metals in the atmosphere in Scotland are carried out on behalf of the Scottish Development Department by the Warren Spring laboratory. It would be very difficult at present to establish the proportion arising from power stations in England and Wales, but it is likely to be negligible.

The concentrations of lead recorded in Scotland have been within the limit value set by the EC directive for lead in air. No generally accepted concentration is set for other elements, but the levels recorded in Scotland have been below mean levels normally recorded in urban atmospheres in the United Kingdom.

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measurements are made by his Department to assess the emissions of sulphur dioxide into the atmosphere in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Measurements of the levels of sulphur dioxide in the atmosphere are not made as a matter of routine by the Scottish Development Department, but are undertaken as part of a survey organised on a national basis under the auspices of the Warren Spring laboratory of the Department of Trade and Industry and funded by the Department of the Environment.

Ski Facilities

Sir Russell Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has given further consideration to the proposals for a ski facility at Aonach Mor in Fort William; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I understand that new proposals for the ski development at Aonach Mor near Fort William are under discussion between the developers and the public bodies involved. The proposals have not yet been submitted to the Industry Department for Scotland.

Sir Russell Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has received any proposals for the extension of the Glencoe ski facility; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I am not aware of any plans for extending the Glencoe ski facility at present. New facilities were opened for the 1987-88 season with Government financial assistance from the Highlands and Islands Development Board and the Scottish Sports Council.

ENVIRONMENT

Water Purity

17. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement on progress made towards full implementation of the European Economic Community directives on drinking water and bathing water.

Mr. Ridley: Most public water supplies for which derogations have been sought from the European Commission are expected to comply with the EC drinking water directive by 1990. In addition, I have asked water undertakers in England to review their investment programmes in the light of my statement of 2 December 1987 about a revised interpretation of this directive.

All significant seaside resorts are included within the scope of the bathing water directive. More than half the bathing waters comply with the directive's standards and major improvement schemes are in hand or planned to bring the others up to these standards.

Planning Laws

18. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received seeking legislation to reform the planning laws.

Mr. Waldegrave: I receive frequent representations asking for planning legislation either to be tightened or to be relaxed.

Rating Reform

19. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met representatives of *(a)* Age Concern, *(b)* the Child Poverty Action Group, *(c)* the Low Pay Unit, *(d)* the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, and *(e)* the British Council of Churches to discuss the effects of the poll tax; and what was discussed.

Mr. Chope: I have not had a request for a meeting to discuss the community charge from any of these bodies.

23. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of electors in the boroughs of Stockton-on-Tees and Middlesbrough currently pay domestic rates; and what forecast he has of the proportion that will pay the community charge.

Mr. Chope: About half the electors in Middlesbrough and Stockton-on-Tees pay rates, whereas virtually all electors will pay the community charge.

36. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the number of gainers and losers from the proposed poll tax in Lewisham.

Mr. Howard: The estimates of gainers and losers from the introduction of the community charge which I published on 13 Janaury were produced using data from the family expenditure survey. Projections for individual local authority areas are not possible because of the limitations of the sample survey data.

40. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people and how many organisations have made representations to him in favour of the community charge since June 1987.

Mr. Nicholas Ridley: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion).

47. **Mr. Cunliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the average community charge that would be levied in 1988-89 if the Local Government Finance Bill were in force.

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) on 28 March at column *312*.

65. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the number of people who will be exempt from paying any community charge under the proposals in the Local Government Finance Bill.

Mr. Howard: I estimate that about ½ million people will be exempt from the community charge.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps, following the introduction of the community charge, to ensure that landlords allow a reduction in rents equivalent to the amount of community charge which the tenant will thereafter have to pay personally.

Mr. Howard: Many tenants already pay rent exclusive of rates, and pay their rates direct to the local authority. Tenants with registered rents, which are always fixed exclusive of rates, will no longer be liable for any separate rates contribution to their landlord when the community charge is introduced. For tenancies granted before the current Housing Bill becomes law, tenants who do not have a registered rent, and who do not know what the rates element of their rent may be, can if necessary at any time register a rent to establish this.

Where a rent assessment committee arbitrates on market rents for new-style assured and shorthold tenancies granted after the Housing Bill becomes law, but before domestic rates are abolished, these rents will also be exclusive of rates. For other assured tenancies granted before the introduction of the community charge, where the tenant has not been paying rates direct to the local authority, it will be for the parties to negotiate a reduction in the rent to reflect the abolition of rates. We shall be issuing advice to tenants on this. We see no need for further measures.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the cost to local authorities of developing computer systems for the poll tax.

Mr. Howard: This is one of the aspects of a study now being undertaken by Price Waterhouse on which a report is expected next month.

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what would be the increase in the maximum net weekly incomes that would qualify for community charge rebates by using a taper of 15 per cent. instead of a taper of 20 per cent. in calculating rebate entitlement.

Mr. Howard: The increase in maximum net weekly incomes that would qualify for community charge rebates by using a taper of 15 per cent. instead of a taper of 20 per cent. would vary according to circumstances of the claimant and the level of the community charge.

I have today placed in the Library a table showing the increase over a range of community charges, for a single person aged 18-24, a couple with two children under 11, and a pensioner couple aged 60-79.

So, for example, on the basis of a taper of 15 per cent., a couple with two children aged under 11, where the community charge is £224 would qualify for a rebate with a net weekly income of up to £131·77. In gross terms this would be approximately £7,700 per annum or nearly three quarters of the national average wage.

National Rivers Authority

20. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to be in a position to announce the appointment of the chairman of the National Rivers Authority.

Mr. Moynihan: Next year. However, I hope shortly to make an announcement about the chairmanship of the National Rivers Authority Advisory Committee.

Waste Disposal Sites

21. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received about safety arrangements for waste disposal sites; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: I have received my hon. Friend's letter of 22 March about building houses on or near old waste disposal sites.

Following a letter in December last to all waste disposal authorities, my Department is currently in the process of establishing the numbers of sites capable of generating methane, and will publish later this year a waste management paper on how to deal with the problem.

Housing (South of England)

22. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further plans he has for increasing the amount of land available for housing in the south of England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend has asked the south east regional planning conference to consider the implications for housing requirements in the south-east of the new population and household projections. In light of SERPLAN's advice, we shall consider the need for revised regional guidance to county planning authorities on the appropriate scale and distribution of housing provision in county structure plans.

Derelict and Unused Land

24. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reviews his Department is undertaking with regard to the release of derelict, vacant, dormant, underutilised and unused land in public ownership.

Mr. Ridley: My Department keeps under constant review the extent of unused and underused land owned by public bodies that is entered on the land registers; and, where necessary, statutory procedures to force disposal are initiated.

25. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether details of vacant, dormant, derelict and underutilised land in Crown ownership are included in the register of vacant land held in his Department.

35. **Sir Peter Hordern:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy that details of vacant, dormant, derelict and underutilised land in Crown ownership to be included in the register of vacant land held in his Department.

52. **Mr. Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now arrange for details of vacant, derelict and underutilised land in Crown ownership to be included in the register of vacant land held by his Department.

Mr. Ridley: Details of unused and underused land in Crown ownership are included in the registers of such land compiled and maintained under part X of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980.

29. **Sir Charles Morrison:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sites of under one acre of vacant, dormant and derelict land are in the ownership of his Department; and when he expects to sell them.

Mr. Chope: Fifteen sites, all of which are in varying stages of disposal, and I expect to complete sales by the end of this financial year.

Litter

26. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received any recent representations from tourist authorities for more effective powers to combat litter.

Mr. Moynihan: No, but I am aware of their concern about litter, which I share.

London Docklands Development Corporation

27. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he has had with the chairman or board of the London Docklands development corporation concerning its response to the letter from Messrs. Robson Rhodes concerning its financial procedures.

Mr. Trippier: The Department has examined the issues identified by Messrs. Robson Rhodes following its 1985-86 external audit of the corporation and the LDDC board's response. I will make a statement shortly about the Department's conclusions.

Reddish Vale (Sale)

28. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the sale of Reddish Vale by the Greater Manchester residuary body.

Mr. Chope: I have received representations from hon. Members, from Stockport and Tameside district councils, from the Tame Valley joint committee and from local residents.

Local Authorities and Housing Associations

30. **Mr. Rogers** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is planning to take to reinforce the partnership between local authorities and housing associations.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have provided the framework for partnership between local authorities and housing associations. We are considering ways in which Exchequer support might be continued for local authority funding of housing association schemes. It is up to local authorities and housing associations themselves to develop partnership.

Private Rented Accommodation

31. **Ms. Short** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the demand for private rented accommodation at market rents.

Mrs. Roe: It is not possible to make any precise estimate of the demand for private rented accommodation at market rents. It is, however, clear that there will always be people who want to rent, in particular, the young, single and mobile and those who cannot afford owner-occupation. We owe it to these people to provide a healthy private sector and we are confident that deregulation of future lettings will help to achieve this objective.

Nuclear Waste

32. **Mr. Kennedy** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next plans to meet the chairman of Nirex to discuss matters relating to the management of nuclear waste.

Mr. Moynihan: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) on 17 February at column *673*.

Vacant Land (Disposal)

33. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much vacant land has been handed over to the Property Services Agency by Government Departments for disposal and has not been sold after 12 months.

42. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much land has been handed over to the Property Services Agency by Government Departments for disposal and has not been sold after 12 months.

64. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the owners of public vacant land in respect of which he has issued more than three disposal notices since the procedures were introduced.

Mr. Trippier: The information is as follows:

My right hon. Friend has given notice, under section 99 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, on more than three occasions, to the following public bodies in respect of unused and underused land in their ownership:

Barking and Dagenham LB
Cheshire CC
Derbyshire CC
Doncaster MBC
Hounslow LB

Kingston LB
Kingston-upon-Hull City Council
Lambeth LB
Leeds City Council
Manchester City Council
Sheffield MDC
Shropshire CC
Southwark LB
Sunderland MBC
Tameside MBC
Trafford MBC

66. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, by size of land holding, the largest public owners of vacant land.

Mr. Trippier: The information is as follows:

On 31 March 1988, the 10 public bodies with the largest areas of land recorded on the registers of publicly-owned unused and underused land were:

	Acres
1. British Rail	8,613
2. DHSS	3,926
3. CEGB	2,724
4. Commission for New Towns	2,507
5. Telford Development Corporation	1,878
6. British Coal	1,781
7. Warrington Development Corporation	1,640
8. Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority	1,410
9. Bristol City Council	1,312
10. Leeds City Council	1,222

58. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much dormant land has been handed over to the Property Services Agency by Government Departments for disposal and has not been sold after 12 months.

Mr. Chope: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) earlier today.

Rates

34. **Mr. Sedgemore:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement in respect of the average increase in rates from 1 April.

Mr. Chope: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) earlier today.

56. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the average increase in domestic rates from 1 April.

Mr. Howard: 8·8 per cent.

Public Vacant Land

37. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average time that public vacant land sites remain on the land register.

Mr. Trippier: This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Southern England (Development)

38. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will announce new controls to restrain development pressures in southern England.

Mr. Waldegrave: We are pursuing a range of policies designed to encourage development in other parts of the country, particularly the inner cities. But provision for economic growth and new housing will still need to be made in southern England. It is the job of the planning system to ensure that necessary development is accommodated in ways which do not conflict with our policies for the green belt and the protection of the countryside.

Rubbish (Illegal Dumping)

39. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with local authorities about the possibility of strengthening present legislation on the illegal dumping of rubbish in residential areas.

Mr. Moynihan: There have been no recent discussions with local authorities about illegal dumping, but the Government remain concerned that action should be taken to reduce or eliminate it. Our proposals for strengthening the law on waste disposal, including a duty of care on waste producers and registration of waste carriers, were made in a consultation paper issued in September 1986. We are considering the responses and hope to make an announcement shortly.

Metaldehydrate and Methiocarb

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any evidence of harmful effects to land, rivers and plant life caused by the use of metaldehydrate and methiocarb.

Mr. Moynihan: I am advised that the substance referred to in the question as metaldehydrate is probably metaldehyde. Products containing metaldehyde and methiocarb are approved under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 for specified uses, mainly as molluscicides. Both substances are toxic and can be harmful to pets and to wildlife, including birds and fish. Pesticides containing these substances should not present an undue hazard to the environment when used according to the conditions of approval.

Rugby Union

43. **Mr. John Carlisle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the president of the Rugby Union; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Moynihan: I last met the president of the Rugby Football Union on 16 December 1987. We discussed taxation and rates, sporting links with South Africa, drug abuse in sport, the rugby World Cup and the redevelopment of Twickenham.

Berkshire Structure Plan

44. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received concerning his proposed modifications to the Berkshire structure plan.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend has received 2,188 written representations to his proposed modifications to the replacement structure plan for Berkshire, together with a substantial petition. The six-week period for representations ended on 31 March 1988.

Green Belt Development (Legal Costs)

45. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make provision for assistance with legal costs for objections against substantial planning applications affecting rural land and land within the green belt.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have no plans to alter the long-standing arrangement that the cost of promoting and of resisting development proposals falls to the respective parties. Nevertheless, applicants who unreasonably pursue on appeal proposals which are contrary to established planning policy, whether in the green belt or elsewhere, may find that the costs of the proceedings where there is an inquiry, including the costs of objectors, are awarded against them.

Benthall Park Development

46. **Sir John Biggs-Davison:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his decision on the proposed Benthall park development, in the light of the policy of Her Majesty's Government on the green belt.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Benthall park development was allowed because of the pressing need to provide new housing for Harlow and the Stansted airport expansion. The detailed boundary of the green belt in the area has yet to be defined. The circumstances of that case were exceptional, and the decision does not signify any lessening of the Government's commitment to protect the green belt from inappropriate development.

Vacant Inner-City Land

48. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies his Department has commissioned to examine the causes of inner city land remaining vacant.

Mr. Trippier: In February 1988 we published "Vacant Urban Land: A Literature Review 1976-86", the central part of which outlines the current state of knowledge on the nature of the urban land market and in particular the causes of urban land vacancy. The Property Advisory Group is presently examining the problems of vacant inner city land, and we expect to commission further research in the near future.

Tree Preservation Orders (Compensation)

49. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to limit the compensation that may be paid when a tree preservation order is issued to a valuation as woodland.

Mr. Moynihan: I refer my hon. Friend to the Adjournment debate which took place in the House on 22 March at columns 335-38. The Government are giving urgent consideration to the most appropriate action to maintain the general effectiveness of tree preservation orders affecting woodland, following the recent decision by the Court of Appeal.

Housing Tenancies (Fiscal Neutrality)

50. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to create greater fiscal neutrality amongst the different housing tenancies.

Mrs. Roe: One of the aims of the Government's housing policy is to encourage the revival of private investment in rented housing. The Chancellor's proposal, announced in the Budget, to extend the business expansion scheme to cover the provision of private rented housing will be a major help in encouraging investment in this sector.

Ancient Monuments

51. **Mr. John M. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received regarding the care and protection of ancient monuments.

Mr. Moynihan: We receive various representations and correspondence from time to time about the care and protection of ancient monuments. Many of these relate to applications for scheduled monument consent, suggestions that monuments should be scheduled, or other policy matters connected with the subject. If my hon. Friend has a particular problem in mind, perhaps he would care to write to me so that I can look into the matter properly.

Green Belt

53. **Mr. Maxton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any proposals to strengthen the powers of local planning authorities in respect of protecting open spaces and the green belt.

Mr. Waldegrave: Planning authorities already have adequate powers to protect these areas.

Home Improvement Grants

54. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any proposals to increase the home improvement grants available to home owners.

Mrs. Roe: The number of improvement grants awarded is determined by local authorities in the light of their assessment of the stock condition in their area and the resources available to them through their housing investment programme allocation and the prescribed proportion of capital receipts. The eligible expense limits used for calculating individual grants are expected to be increased later this year.

Westminster City Council (Cemetery Sales)

55. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement in respect of investigations by the district auditor into the disposal of cemeteries by Westminster city council.

Mr. Chope: The district auditor is still investigating the matter and I cannot anticipate the outcome.

Land Disposal

57. **Mr. John Browne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking in the context of the recent Government policy statement "Action for Inner Cities", to speed up the disposal of land from the land registers.

Mr. Trippier: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend to the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) on 7 March at columns *75-76*. The policy

outlined then is additional to action already in train: the provisions of the Local Government Act 1988 streamline the procedures for directing disposals; and since 7 March further disposal directions have been issued and statutory procedures initiated in respect of other pieces of land.

Government-owned Empty Property

59. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is initiating any action to bring Government-owned empty property into use for families in housing stress.

Mrs. Roe: Departments are fully aware of the need to bring empty dwellings back into use or, where they are no longer needed, to sell them as quickly as possible. Operational requirements are reviewed regularly and targets (agreed with the Treasury) set to reduce their vacant stock.

Where Departments have no immediate operational need for empty dwellings but disposal is not practicable, they are encouraged to let them temporarily to local authorities or housing associations so that they may be used for homeless people. So far more than 275 lettings have been arranged by the Ministry of Defence.

House Repairs

60. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to encourage local authorities to find their own schemes for repairing houses designated as defective under the Housing Act 1985.

Mrs. Roe: Of the 50 repair systems for designated house types now licensed by PRC Homes Ltd., six have been commissioned by local authorities, and three more are currently under appraisal. Local authorities are already encouraged to submit their own schemes for licensing, particularly where they possess house types not commonly found elsewhere.

London (Voluntary Sector)

61. **Ms. Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent study he has made of the effect of Greater London council abolition on the voluntary sector in London.

Mr. Chope: I have not commissioned such a study and have no plans to do so.

Water Companies Association

62. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met representatives of the Water Companies Association; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Moynihan: With the Minister for the Environment, Countryside and Water, I met representatives of the Water Companies Association on 25 January. We discussed their response to our two consultation papers on the statutory water companies.

Out-of-Town Shopping Centres

63. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what criteria he uses, with particular reference to the impact on employment in the inner cities, when deciding upon planning applications for out-of-town shopping centres; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I refer my hon. Friend to a planning policy guidance note on major retail development (PPG6) issued by my Department and the Welsh Office on 20 January this year. Copies are in the Library. The note advises that, exceptionally, it will be necessary to consider whether the cumulative effects of other recent and proposed large scale retail developments in a locality could seriously affect the vitality and viability of a nearby town centre as a whole.

Housing Action Trusts

67. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now announce the areas where the first housing action trusts will be established.

Mrs. Roe: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland) on 16 March 1988 at column *598*.

London Residuary Body

68. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to add an additional member nominated by the Association of London Authorities to the London residuary body; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 14 April at column *233*.

Redundant Farm Buildings

69. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he proposes to take to encourage the conversion of redundant farm buildings for small businesses.

Mrs. Roe: The planning policy guidance note on rural enterprise and development (PPG7), issued jointly by my Department and the Welsh Office on 20 January this year, emphasised yet again the contribution that reuse of redundant farm buildings can make to the rural economy without harm to the rural environment. Grants for the conversion of redundant buildings in rural development areas are available from the Rural Development Commission.

System Built Housing

70. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the types of building systems designated under the Housing Defects Act.

Mrs. Roe: We have no general plans to review the list of nationally designated property types; but we are currently reconsidering Milton Keynes borough council's request that certain properties in its area be designated nationally and hope to reach a decision shortly.

Special Need Housing

71. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement concerning the future provision of special needs housing by housing associations; and when he will publish the planned consultation paper on the future of hostel deficit grant.

Mrs. Roe: The Government recognise the achievements of the housing association movement in the provision of

special needs housing, and continue to attach great importance to the work of associations in this area. The Department's consultation paper on the future of hostel deficit grant will be issued within the next few weeks.

Private Empty Properties (Lease-back Arrangements)

72. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is making additional funds available for local authorities to enter into lease-back arrangements with the owners of private empty properties.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend's statement of 9 March indicated that he would consider giving additional capital allocations to facilitate projects which were brought within the capital control system by the measures announced in his statement, but which had not primarily been entered into for the purpose of avoiding capital expenditure or borrowing controls. In addition, my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning announced on 24 March that £28 million extra capital allocations would be targeted on local authorities where homelessness pressures are most acute. These allocations will not be confined to schemes for the leasing of property as these are not necessarily the most cost-effective means of providing accommodation.

East Deane Local Plan

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to receive the report of the inspector into the East Deane local plan, relating to Taunton Deane, Somerset.

Mr. Waldegrave: Inspectors who conduct inquiries into local plans report not to my right hon. Friend but to the local planning authority which prepared the plan. I understand that the inspector's report on the East Deane local plan was sent to Taunton Deane borough council on 15 April.

Haringey (Rate Support Grant)

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the level of rate support grant to Haringey borough council in each year since 1979 at current prices; and what proportion this represented of their total income.

Mr. Chope: The information is as follows:

	Rate support grant £ million	*Per cent. of total income*[1]
1979-80	52·902	56·7
1980-81	61·816	51·9
1981-82[2]	56·489	38·9
1982-83[2]	60·325	41·0
1983-84[3]	56·986	33·5
1984-85[3]	56·691	31·0
1985-86[3]	63·605	30·0
1986-87[4]	51·047	n/a
1987-88[4]	71·511	n/a
1988-89[4]	84·667	n/a

[1] Total income is defined as rate fund revenue account gross income comprising sales, fees, charges, interest receipts, local rates, specific grants and rate support grant. It is net of general administration recharged to other services and accounts.

[2] The grant figures and grant as a percentage of total income are not comparable with those for years before 1981-82 because the arrangements for paying grant changed in 1981-82; the needs resources and domestic elements of grant were replaced by block grant and domestic rate relief grant.

[3] Income and grant as a percentage of total income are not comparable with those for years before 1983-84 due to the introduction of the unified housing benefit scheme in 1983-84 when arrangements for paying grant to local authorities were changed.

[4] The grant figures are not comparable with those for years before 1986-87 because of changes in local authorities' responsibilities following the abolition of the GLC.

n/a = not available.

Rhinoceros Populations and Products

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 28 January, *Official Report*, column 375, what progress he has made in formulating a detailed response to the resolution passed at the sixth meeting of the parties to CITES, relating to rhinoceros populations and trade in rhinoceros products.

Mr. Moynihan: A detailed response to this resolution remains a matter for discussion with our European Community partners. Meanwhile the controls on international trade in rhino horn remain as set out in my reply of 28 January. We have in addition, through our embassies in Kinshasa and Dhubai registered with the Burundi and UAE authorities, United Kingdom's concern about illegal trade in this product.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provisions are in existence to ensure that employment opportunities are made available to local residents in those areas where urban development corporations have been established.

Mr. Trippier: All urban development corporations see the creation of employment opportunities for those who live in and around their areas as an important part of their work. Each makes provision which seems appropriate to its circumstances.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each urban development corporation the percentage change in unemployment that has been realised since their establishment.

Mr. Trippier: Unemployment statistics are not available specifically for the areas of urban development corporations, although certain surveys have been carried out in Merseyside and London docklands. The Department of the Environment, the Manpower Services Commission and the corporations themselves have recently presented evidence on this complex subject to the Employment Committee. This will be published in due course, but in the meantime I refer the hon. Member to the uncorrected proofs which have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each urban development corporation the percentage and real term increase in value of property for sale and lease since their inception.

Mr. Trippier: Property values vary widely within each urban development corporation's area. There is no single measure of property values in each area currently available. The answer I gave the hon. Member on March 22, at column 55, may be helpful in indicating current values in the areas of the first two corporations, the range of those values and the factors which influence them.

Hevenigham Hall

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the identity of the present owner of Hevenigham hall, and as to their nature and status.

Mr. Moynihan: Hevenigham hall was conveyed in November 1981 to ID Investment Development AG, a company registered in Switzerland.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department is taking to identify the persons or bodies responsible for discharging the undertakings given at the time of the sale of Hevenigham hall; and what steps are being taken to enforce the discharge of those undertakings.

Mr. Moynihan: Hevenigham hall was conveyed to ID Investment Development AG in November 1981. Mr. Abdul-Amir Misr Al-Ghazzi personally covenanted with the Secretary of State in December 1981 that he would himself, so far as he was able, observe, or procure the observance of, the covenants of sale if the company should in any respect fail to fulfil them.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) on 18 February in respect of the discharging of the covenants of sale. We continue to monitor the situation carefully.

River Bailiffs

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provision there will be for bailiffing of rivers when the National River Authority is created.

Mr. Moynihan: The National Rivers Authority will assume the responsibility of the water authorities for fisheries conservation and management, and will be expected to adopt positive policies for fisheries management, including bailiffing.

Hydrologic Code Comparison Project

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the hydrologic code intercomparison project sponsored by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development nuclear energy agency has been completed; and whether the United Kingdom has contributed any technical assistance to the project.

Mr. Moynihan: If the hon. Member is referring to the international HYDROCOIN (hydrological code intercomparison) project, which was started in May 1984 by the Swedish nuclear power inspectorate (SKI), the Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development participates as a member of the project secretariat, I understand that the project is complete and that reports of the various test cases are being prepared for publication in the near future. The British Geological Survey, the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority and Atkins Research and Development Ltd. have participated in the project.

Montreal Protocol

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when Her Majesty's Government will ratify the Montreal protocol.

Mr. Moynihan: The text of the protocol was laid before both Houses on 26 January 1988 and the necessary parliamentary procedures are, therefore, complete for the United Kingdom. We are now consulting the dependent territories and expect this process to be completed in good time to meet the target date for the protocol to enter into force on 1 January 1989. We are also discussing with our European partners a proposed decision that would enable the Community and its member states to ratify the protocol simultaneously.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what nations are currently signatories to the Montreal protocol; and which of them have ratified it.

Mr. Moynihan: The information is as follows:

At a Diplomatic Conference on 16 September 1987 the Montreal protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer was signed by:

Belgium
Canada
Denmark
European Economic Community
Egypt
Finland
France
Germany, Federal Republic of
Ghana
Italy
Japan
Kenya
Mexico
Netherlands
New Zealand
Norway
Panama
Portugal
Senegal
Sweden
Switzerland
Togo
United Kingdom
United States of America
Venezuela

We understand from the United Nations environment programme that it has since been signed by:

Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic
Greece
Israel
Luxembourg
Morocco
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

So far as we have been informed, the United States is the only country to have ratified the protocol.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give figures for the amount by which (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) the European Community will have to cut consumption of chlorofluorocarbons by (a) 1990, (b) 1994 and (c) 1999 to meet the requirements of the Montreal protocol.

Mr. Moynihan: Under the Montreal protocol all parties are required by 1990 to freeze consumption of CFCs 11, 12, 113, 114 and 115 at 1986 levels; to reduce their consumption by 20 per cent. by 1994; and by a further 30 per cent. by 1999. The proposed regulation for implementing the protocol envisages that obligations in regard to consumption will be fulfilled by the Community as a whole but complete information about its level of consumption is not yet available. Separate figures are not available for the United Kingdom or other individual member states.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on (i) the outcome of the European Community Council of Ministers meeting on 21 March regarding implementation of the Montreal protocol, (ii) what implementation programmes have been and will be undertaken by each of the European Community member states and (iii) future plans for consultation among European Community member states.

Mr. Moynihan: On the hon. Member's first point, I refer to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) on 24 March at columns *186-87*. Communitywide implementation of the protocol is the subject of a proposed regulation which is being examined by member states and which will be discussed by the Environment Council on 16 June.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he plans to request a review of the terms of the Montreal protocol in the light of new scientific data particularly that published by the International Ozone Trends Panel on 15 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: The Montreal protocol contains its own provisions for regular reviews of the control measures on the basis of scientific, environmental, technical and economic information. The first such review will be undertaken in 1990. In the meantime the Department's stratospheric ozone research group is studying all the latest scientific evidence, including that of the ozone trends panel, and will publish an up-to-date assessment in the autumn.

Ozone Research Programme

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give figures for public expenditure on each stratospheric ozone research programme receiving grants from Her Majesty's Government for each year since 1980 for which figures are available; and whether he plans to increase expenditure on such research.

Mr. Moynihan: Expenditure on stratospheric ozone research by the Department, the Meteorological Office, the Natural Environment Research Council and the Science and Engineering Research Council, for each year since 1980 is as follows:

£'000s

	1980-81	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*
DOE	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	25	48	118	140	171
Met Office	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	221	164	180	353	n/a
NERC	n/a	531	493	912	455	443	344	505	n/a
SERC	50	100	100	200	850	1,000	2,000	1,100	n/a

Note: n/a indicates figures not readily available. SERC current commitments for 1988-89 are £335,000.

Expenditure by the Department has risen steadily over this period, and we are considering a further increase.

Sewers (Leeds)

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what request he has received for an increase in the capital funding for the Yorkshire water authority for the completion of resewering of the Rothwell area of Leeds; what response he has made; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what request he has had for additional assistance to the Yorkshire water authority to help prevent raw sewage entering the river Dolphin in Rothwell, Leeds; what response he has made, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: None. This year my right hon. Friend increased capital expenditure provision for Yorkshire Water to £132 million.

Water Privatisation

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent discussions he has had with the Water Authorities Association about the regulation which will apply in the water industry following the privatisation legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: Pursuant to my answer on 9 March to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) at column *228*, the Minister for Environment, Countryside and Water met the chairman of the Water Authorities Association on 8 March and 19 April to discuss a range of issues relating to the privatisation of the water industry, including regulation.

Water Services

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assurances he has given to the Water Authorities Association about the maintenance of the efficiency of water authorities' services after the demise of the integrated river basin concept of management; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: I refer the hon. Member to the consultation paper and policy memorandum, published by the Government in July and December last year. Copies of both were placed in the Library of the House.

Air Pollution

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the dangers that can be caused by the discharge of an excessive level of sulphur dioxide into the atmosphere over England and Wales.

Mr. Moynihan: There is extensive literature on health and other effects of sulphur dioxide, a convenient summary of which is contained in WHO "Air Quality Guidelines for Europe," WHO regional publications, European series No. 23. The permitted level for SO_2 in air is set by the EC directive 80/779/EEC.

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what information he has on the dangers that can be caused by the discharge of an excessive level of heavy metals into the atmosphere over England and Wales;

(2) what assessment is made by his Department of the level of heavy metals discharged into the atmosphere annually from the burning of fossil fuels by electricity generating stations in England and Wales; what are the levels for the remaining discharge of heavy metals; and what is treated as a safe level.

Mr. Moynihan: There is extensive literature on the health and environmental effects of excessive levels of heavy metals. In England and Wales Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution ensures that best practicable means are used to reduce emissions to the atmosphere from power stations and other scheduled works to safe levels set on the basis of the available scientific data. Current presumptive emission limits are given in appendix 7 of the industrial air pollution report for 1986, copies of which are in the Library of the House. Total emissions are not assessed as a matter of routine in the United Kingdom, but concentrations of a wide range of metals in the environment are regularly measured in both urban and rural areas. The results are reported in Department of the Environment "Statistical Bulletin (87) 1", copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House. For lead the permitted level in the air is set in the EC directive (82/884/EEC).

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measurements are made by his Department to assess the emissions of sulphur dioxide into the atmosphere in England and Wales; and what comparable information he has for France, Germany, Belgium, Holland, Norway, Sweden and Finland over the years since 1980.

Mr. Moynihan: Estimates of sulphur dioxide emissions are made from the quantity of fossil fuel used and of its sulphur content. The results are published annually in the Department of the Environment's "Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics", copies of which are placed in the Library of the House. Details of the methods used are given in the Warren Spring laboratory report WSL LR634 a copy of which will be placed in the Library of the House. In 1986 the executive body of the convention on long-range transboundary air pollution published a major review entitled "National strategies and policies for Air Pollution Abatement" which contains estimates of SO_2 emissions provided by France, Germany, Belgium, Holland, Norway, Sweden and Finland for years since 1980. A copy of the report is in the Library of the House.

Water Byelaws

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the new model water byelaws.

Mr. Moynihan: The latest edition of the model water byelaws was published in June 1986.

Drinking Water

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to bring the quality of drinking water in England and Wales up to the standard required by the European Economic Community in advance of the date previously given.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 19 April 1988]:* I welcome any steps being taken by water undertakers to comply with the EC drinking water directive in advance of dates already set.

Water (Nitrates Pollution)

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what evidence he has of increased pollution of public water supplies by nitrates over the past 20 years; and what are the reasons for the increase;

(2) what evidence he has of the increased pollution of groundwater supplies by nitrates over the past 20 years; and if he will make a statement on the implications of this for public health policy.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer, 19 April 1988]:* In 1986, 152 groundwater sources occasionally or persistently contained nitrate concentrations exceeding 50 mg per litre, compared with approximately 90 in 1980 and 60 in 1970. The increased nitrate concentrations can be attributed to the substantial change in farming methods over the last few decades.

As a result of action by water undertakers, nitrate concentrations regularly exceed 50 mg per litre in only 50 public supplies though the concentrations are not considered unsafe by medical advisers. Nevertheless, the rising trend in some areas is a matter of concern and the Government are considering ways of tackling the problem.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment why he agreed to the European Community directive restricting nitrate pollution of water supplies to 50 mg; what expert advice was received from outside his Department on the health aspects of the issue; and what is the level now recommended by the World Health Organisation and other comparable bodies.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 19 April 1988]:* The EC directive on the quality of water intended for human consumption was adopted in 1980. The nitrate standard was agreed because the figure of 50 mg of nitrate per litre had been recommended by the World Health Organisation as a guideline value since 1970, and medical experts in this country accepted that recommendation. Guideline values are intended to safeguard health, assuming life-long consumption at that value.

The World Health Organisation has since reviewed its guideline values for substances in drinking water and in 1984 published recommendations which included a revised value of 10 mg of nitrate as nitrogen per litre (equivalent to 44·6 mg of nitrate per litre). The apparent reduction from 50 mg of nitrate per litre to 44·6 mg per litre is of no medical significance.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the number of public water supplies which exceed the 50 mg limit in relation to nitrate pollution; what will be the cost of bringing these supplies within the directive; and what is the body responsible for paying such costs.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 19 April 1988]:* Fifty public water supplies are estimated to contain nitrate concentrations above 50 mg per litre. The Department is

currently seeking information on how much it would cost water undertakers to comply with the EC drinking water directive limit for nitrate.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the implications of the Single European Act provisions on the responsibilities for pollution in relation to Government policy; how these are determined; and if consideration has been given to the allocation of the cost of preventing nitrate pollution.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 19 April 1988]:* The Single European Act introduced changes to the treaty of Rome. Among these is a new chapter on the environment. This lays down broad objectives in the area of environmental protection. It also confirms the principles of preventive action, that environmental damage should as a priority be rectified at source, and that the polluter should pay. However, the Act does not have specific implications for Government responsibilities; rather, it serves as a platform for the production of further Council legislation, which will be more specific in its terms.

The articles in the new environment chapter (Articles 130R, 130S and 130T) now provide the usual legal base for environmental measures. These articles proceed on the basis of unanimity, at least in the first instance.

Limestone Purchases

Sir Hugh Rossi: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice was given by his Department to the Central Electricity Generating Board on purchases of limestone for flue gas desulphurisation from quarries outside the national parks.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 19 April 1988]:* My Department was one of a number of organisations consulted by the Central Electricity Generating Board on its proposals for obtaining the supplies of limestone it needed for flue gas desulphurisation. My Department drew the board's attention to the importance of the Government's policy on winning and working of minerals in national parks and the statement by my hon. Friend the member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) on 9 April, at columns *393-94*. We also called attention to reports published by the British Geological Survey which described the location and quality of limestone resources both inside and outside national parks. We advised the board to discuss its needs with the mineral planning authorities, in order to establish whether suitable supplies of limestone would be available from outside the national parks, and the wider planning issues.

Richmond Terrace

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what proportion of the annual budget for property valuation and revaluation was used over the valuation of Richmond terrace;

(2) whether he will make a statement as to the effect on resources available to the Property Services Agency for valuation and revaluation of property arising from his decision to employ Cluttons to value Richmond terrace.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* Sums for valuation and revaluation of property are made available from resources set aside for expenditure on consultants' fees. Final figures for PSA expenditure on consultants' fees in 1987-88 for the civil estate are not yet available, but the total is expected to be about £56 million. Cluttons' fee for the valuation of Richmond house comprised substantially less than 0·1 per cent. of this expenditure. The effect on resources available to PSA for the employment of consultants was therefore minimal.

DEFENCE

Territorial Army

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress being made by the National Employer Liaison Committee on stimulating recruitment into the Territorial Army.

Mr. Freeman: Provision has been made to find the central major publicity campaign recommended by the National Employer Liaison Committee. Preparatory work had already been carried out and planning is now under way, in order to launch the campaign in autumn 1988. Although this campaign is intended primarily to improve the status, and promote public awareness, of not only the Territorial Army, but the other reserve forces, we would hope to see benefits in both recruitment and retention.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what number of beds there are, and what is the average level of occupancy, in each of his Department's hospitals in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) on 12 January, at columns *200-2*.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the movement of United States' nuclear weapons from continental Europe to the United Kingdom as part of the redistribution of nuclear forces in Europe under the terms of the Montebello decision.

Mr. Ian Stewart: It has been the policy of successive Governments not to comment on the location of nuclear weapons.

NATO

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the next nuclear planning group meeting will be discussing modernisation and redeployment of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation maritime tactical nuclear weapons.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) on 22 January at column *899*.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement regarding his definition and understanding of the use of the expression class of firearm in relation to the civilian use of firearms on ranges either constructed, maintained or approved by his Department;

(2) on what dates and for what calibre of firearms his Department granted or amended range safety certificates

for ranges at *(a)* Dunmore shooting centre, Abingdon, *(b)* Berkshire Downs Firearms and Ballistics Company and *(c)* Wiltshire shooting centre, Devizes, Wiltshire.

Mr. Freeman: The expression "class of firearm" accepted by my Department is as set out in the current Firearms Act and in the Firearms (Amendment) Bill. Range safety certificates have been issued as follows:

a. To Dunmore shooting centre, Abingdon on 18 August 1986 for 0·455in centre fire weapons;

b. To Berkshire Downs Firearms and Ballistics Company (now known as the Lambourn Valley gun club) on 11 May 1987 for centre fire pistol and rim fire rifle 0·455in calibre weapons;

c. To Wiltshire shooting centre, Devizes, initially on 19 September 1983 for 0·455in pistol on the 25m range and 0·455in rifle and pistol on the 100m range. This was amended on 8 April 1985 to increase the calibre for both ranges to 0·8in; on 10 September 1985 to permit single shot firing of 0·5in maching gun into a special bullet catcher from a fixed breach block on the 100m range; on 22 May 1986 to include handheld and tripod mounted automatic weapons on the 100m range; on 6 February 1987 to allow firing of 0·5in Browning machine gun in the automatic mode on the 100m range; and finally on 19 June 1987 to permit a 20m Hispano Suiza cannon to be fired on the 100m range.

MOD range certificates and inspections cover only the safety of range structures and the adequacy of safety rules.

Greenham Common

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total number of charges brought by the Ministry of Defence police under the Greenham common byelaws that were ruled invalid by Reading Crown court; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The total number of charges brought under those provisions of the Greenham common byelaws which have been held to be invalid cannot be identified without disproportionate effort. The Crown Prosecution Service has appealed against the decision given at Reading Crown court on 25 February 1988 and it would therefore not be appropriate for me to comment further.

Enford (Firing Incident)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will initiate an inquiry into the accidental firing of a 105mm artillery shell into the village of Enford on Salisbury plain in Wiltshire, on 11 April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: On 11 April a 105mm artillery shell fired by 14 Field Regiment from a light gun on Salisbury plain landed outside the range danger area in the back garden of a resident in Enford. A young boy at school in Enford was hit by a piece of metal, but, fortunately, he was not injured. There were no other injuries, but there was some damage to property and windows. Claims relating to the damage to property will be handled by the Property Services Agency on my Department's behalf and a representative from the Property Services Agency has already visited the properties concerned. The claims branch in my Department is empowered to pay compensation where a causal link has been established between the loss or damage incurred and the military activity.

A preliminary investigation of the incident has been carried out. It has concluded that it was not caused by a fault either in the ammunition or the gun. It is, therefore, likely that the incident was caused by an error in drill by one or more members of the gun crew.

In view of the fact that the incident is believed to have been caused by human error, artillery firing on Salisbury plain has not been suspended. The crucial importance of closely following safety procedures has been drawn to the attention of the regiment concerned. Investigations into the incident are continuing and a board of inquiry will be convened when appropriate. All incidents involving public safety are treated extremely seriously and all practical steps will be taken to find the cause of this incident and to prevent any recurrence. Further safeguards may be introduced in the light of the outcome of the board of inquiry.

Ports (Category 2 Berths)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all category 2 berths in the United Kingdom by port.

Mr. Sainsbury:

Barrow-in-Furness
Barry
Brodick Bay
Campbeltown
Cardiff
Coulport
Devonport
Firth of Forth
Glen Mallan
Lamlash Bay
Lerwick and Shetland Isles
Liverpool
Loch Ewe
Loch Fyne
Loch Goil
Loch Striven
Portland
Portree
Portsmouth
Raasay
Rosyth
Rothsay
Southampton
Spithead
Thurso Bay
Torbay

RAF Bentwaters

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence why two squadrons of United States Air Force A-10As are being moved from RAF Bentwaters to RAF Alconbury; on what dates this move is to be started and completed; what are his plans for the future use of the facilities at Bentwaters vacated by these aircraft; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The redeployment of United States Air Force A-10 aircraft from RAF Bentwaters to RAF Alconbury, which was announced in August last year, is part of the continuous process by which the United States seeks the most cost-effective disposition of its assets based in this country in support of NATO. The move began this month and is planned to be complete by the autumn. RAF Bentwaters will continue to be an operational flying station used by the United States Air Force.

Wessex Helicopters

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be *(a)* the range, *(b)* the poor-weather performance, *(c)* the station-keeping abilities, *(d)* the speed and *(e)* the accuracy level of the navigational equipment of the Wessex helicopters to be used by the air-sea rescue squadron at RAF Coltishall in place of Sea King helicopters.

Mr. Freeman: The Wessex search and rescue helicopters which will replace those Sea Kings presently at RAF Coltishall have a range of 120 nautical miles. They can operate in most weather conditions, by day and night but for station keeping reply on visual reference only. The maximum speed is 110 knots and they carry a sophisticated navigation system which is highly accurate for low-level flying. Each aircraft also has a fully trained SAR navigator.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied that the replacement of Sea King helicopters with Wessex helicopters at RAF Coltishall will not reduce the performance of the air-sea rescue service covering the North sea.

Mr. Freeman: Yes. The search and rescue service covering the North sea will not be reduced following the replacement of the Sea King helicopters at RAF Coltishall with Wessexes.

Woolwich Arsenal

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the various establishments now occupying the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, indicating the number of people employed at each.

Mr. Sainsbury:

	Number of employees
MOD Units	
Directorate General of Defence Quality Assurance	1,256
Naval Publications Store	83
Air Publications and Forms Stores	105
RAF Movements Unit (London)	33
RAF Signals Unit	206
Ministry of Defence Police	50
Non MOD Units	
Books Supply Department (British Library)	24
Her Majesty's Customs & Excise Stores	50
National Maritime Museum	3
Civil Service Catering Organisation	14
Property Services Agency/Department of the Environment	65

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what plans for a new headquarters building for the directorate general of quality assurance at Woolwich arsenal were drawn up; and what costs have so far been incurred on the project;

(2) how long the location of the headquarters building of the directorate general of quality assurance has been under review; what sites have been considered during that period; and when a decision will finally be taken.

Mr. Sainsbury: Sketch plans for a headquarter building at the royal arsenal, Woolwich for the quality assurance directorate (ordnance) were completed in 1983 at a cost to the Property Services Agency of £300,000. This directorate became part of the directorate general of defence quality assurance in 1984. Since then the directorate general has concentrated on three of its five original sites and a dozen sites in the midlands and the north and south of England including the royal arsenal have been studied by accommodation staffs for suitability as a single headquarter location. This is an expensive project and a decision will be taken when the complex and continuous preparatory work of exploring options is complete.

Tain Bombing Range

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he willl make a statement on the proposed privatisation of certain services at Tain bombing range.

Mr. Sainsbury: On 24 March 1988, we informed the trades unions of our intention to seek tenders for the provision of services at Tain. If these services are put out to contract, some seven civilian staff would be affected. However, no final decision will be made until the tenders have been assessed and compared with the cost of current arrangements.

Search and Rescue

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he expects to receive the results of the current review of search and rescue operations;

(2) if it is the Government's intention to maintain search and rescue operations at RAF Leuchars.

Mr. Freeman: Certain elements of our review of the most effective deployment of military search and rescue helicopters have been completed and announced. Studies into the deployment of the remaining aircraft continue, and I shall announce the outcome as soon as possible.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about the need to maintain search and rescue operations at RAF Leuchars.

Mr. Freeman: A number of hon. Members, including the hon. Member and my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), have raised with me the importance of search and rescue operations at RAF Leuchars.

Low Flying

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the statutory and other powers under which his Department authorises military low flying training.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* Military low flying training is carried out in the essential interests of national defence under the royal prerogative.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Child Care

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what child care provision his Ministry provides for pre-school age children of the Department's employees; what child care provision for school holiday and/or after school care is provided for employees' children age five and over; what plans there are for increasing provision in the next five years; and how these are to be funded.

Mr. MacGregor: Summer holiday play schemes are currently being arranged at two locations and pump-priming finance has been made available to help them succeed. Similar assistance will be given to any other appropriate child care scheme presented by parents.

Brucellosis

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will publish the number of cases of beef cattle found to have brucellosis in on-farm tests for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. MacGregor: The information cannot be provided without disproportionate cost. However, the numbers of beef and dairy herds from which brucella abortus has been isolated since 1983 are:

Herds from which brucella abortus isolated

Year	*Number*
1983	25
1984	32
1985	69
1986	39
1987	3

Fresh Water Fisheries

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money is spent on fresh water fisheries research in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Wales.

Mr. Gummer: Government expenditure on research and development related to salmon and freshwater fisheries in 1987-88 is estimated at £2 million. Of this amount, £625,000 was expenditure by my Department on work relating to both England and Wales. Expenditure on research and development related to salmon and freshwater fisheries is also incurred by the water authorities and NERC research institutes, but details are not held centrally.

Council of Agriculture Ministers

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Council of Agriculture Ministers' meeting on 18 and 19 April in Luxembourg; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The greater part of this meeting, at which I represented the United Kingdom, was devoted to discussion of the Commission's proposals for farm prices and related measures in 1988-89. No decisions were taken, and no real progress was made. The Council will return to the subject at its next meeting. I again emphasised the importance I attach to the devaluation of the green pound and the removal of monetary compensatory amounts for pigmeat.

The Council had, at its two previous meetings, reached agreement on the Commission's proposals for detailed implementation of the arrangements for stabilising agricultural expenditure and related matters, including the set-aside of arable land, following the outcome of the summit in February. This Council meeting included a session with representatives of the European Parliament, at which the Parliament's opinions on the Commission's proposals were discussed, with the exception of the stabiliser in the wine sector, on which the Parliament's opinion is not yet available. Following this discussion, it was decided that the texts of these measures should be formally adopted without further discussion next week except for wine which will be formally adopted as soon as the Parliament's opinion has been received. I made it clear that since it has always been crucial to the United Kingdom Government that the stabiliser package must be approved as a whole it would be necessary that appropriate arrangements were agreed for ensuring that the wine stabiliser was not weakened; I secured a satisfactory Council declaration on this point.

The Council reached agreement on the remaining technical points on a draft directive on quick-frozen foods. I successfully resisted attempts to reduce the 10-year transitional period for retail cabinets and temperature tolerance, which are of substantial importance to our industry. This directive will be finalised after further discussion on the implementing details.

I opposed the adoption of the proposals for the harmonisation of meat inspection charges, which is unsatisfactory in its present form. This proposal, together with those on the therapeutic use of hormones and the import of meat for pet food will come back to the Council at its next meeting after further discussion at official level.

Sea Fish Industry Authority

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many grant applications received by the Sea Fish Industry Authority in 1987 *(a)* have been successful, *(b)* have been unsuccessful and *(c)* are still to be processed.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 15 April 1988]:* The information requested is as follows:

Type of application	*Received*	*Approved*	*With-drawn/ rejected*	*Under con-sideration*
New vessel	122	49	13	60
Re-engining	131	122	6	3
Improvement	2,348	1,954	97	297

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 21 April 1988

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Attorney-General (1) what are the current establishment figures for legally qualified persons in each Crown Prosecution Service area in England and Wales;

(2) what are the current establishment figures for non-legally qualified persons in each Crown Prosecution Service area in England and Wales;

(3) how many non-legally qualified persons were employed in each Crown Prosecution Service area in England and Wales at the latest date available.

The Attorney-General: The information requested is given in the following table, which represents the position as at 31 March 1988.

CPS area	*Establishment figures for legally qualified staff*	*Establishment figures for non-legally qualified staff*	*Staff-in-post figures for non-legally qualified staff*
Avon/Somerset	42	62	56
Bedfordshire/Hertfordshire	47	60	57·5
Cambridgeshire/Lincolnshire	34	48	38·5
Cheshire	31	40·5	38·5
Cleveland/North Yorkshire	46	64	61
Cumbria/Lancashire	66	76	75
Derbyshire	28	41	42
Devon/Cornwall	37	43	37
Dorset/Hampshire	66	84	79·5
Durham/Northumbria	70	103	100
Essex	32	49	43·5
Gloucestershire/Wiltshire	27	41	37
Greater Manchester	122	129	122
Humberside	25	42	42
Kent	44	61	57·5
Leicestershire/Northamptonshire	38	59	57
London, Inner	130	334	294·5
London, North	96	177	158·5
London, South	87	135	114
Merseyside	74	107	105
Norfolk/Suffolk	34	45	42
North Wales/Dyfed	40	57	58·5
Nottinghamshire	39	54	52
South Wales/Gwent	76	103	97
South Yorkshire	43	63	52·5
Staffordshire/Warwickshire	41	59	57
Sussex	41	52	49·5
Thames Valley	53	74	61
West Mercia	32	38	38
West Midlands	91	124	116
West Yorkshire	74	106	102

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Attorney-General what are the proposed new rates of remuneration proposed for *(a)* legally qualified and *(b)* non-legally qualified persons in the Crown Prosecution Service.

The Attorney-General: The proposed new rates of pay for *(a)* legally qualified and *(b)* non-legally qualified staff in the Crown Prosecution Service are as follows:

(a) Proposed rates of remuneration for legally qualified staff in the CPS

Grade	*Proposed rate (minimum and maximum) at 1 April 1988*	*Performance point maximum[1] after 1 October 1988[2]*
(i) National		
Crown Prosecutor (CP)	13,125-17,736	20,532
Senior Crown Prosecutor (SCP)	16,692-21,737	25,921
6	19,905-27,087	31,563
5	27,087-30,387	35,371
(ii) London[3] and some Home Counties		

Grade	Proposed rate (minimum and maximum) at 1 April 1988	Performance point maximum[1] after 1 October 1988[2]
Crown Prosecutor (CP)	14,125-18,736	21,532
Senior Crown Prosecutor (SCP)	18,228-23,737	28,154
6	22,226-28,154	32,784
5	27,087-30,387	35,371

[1] Subjct to performance assessment.
[2] After 1 April 1988 in the case of Crown prosecutors.
[3] These figures do not include London weighting.

(b) Proposed rates of remuneration for non legally qualified staff in the CPS

Grade	Proposed rate minimum-maximum at 1 April 1988	Performance point maximum[1]	Proposed rate minimum-maximum from 1 October 1988	Performance point maximum[1]
7	15,631-21,104	21,936	16,692-21,737	25,921
6	19,537-26,348	27,388	19,905-27,087	31,563
5	25,756-29,344	30,644	27,087-30,387	35,371

[1] Subject to performance assessment.

Grade	Present rate (minimum-maximum) at 31 March 1988	Proposed rate (minimum-maximum) at 1 April 1988
SEO	12,255-15,779	Current offer is these rates plus 4 per cent. Detailed pay scales not yet published.
HEO	9,985-12,878	
EO	5,870-10,292	
AO	3,664-7,247	
AA	3,314-5,799	
Senior personal secretary	8,400-10,150	
Personal secretary	6,607-7,846	
Typing manager	8,400-10,100	
Typist	4,964-6,363	

Note: These figures do not include London weighting.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Attorney-General when he anticipates that the establishment numbers will be complete in the Crown Prosecution Service; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: It is difficult to estimate when the establishment figures within the Crown Prosecution Service will be complete until the full impact has been felt of the proposed new pay scales for lawyers. In addition to this offer, the service is considering a number of initiatives aimed at encouraging recruitment and retention of staff.

TRANSPORT

Speed Limits

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to reduce the use of rural and urban speed limits.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: None. The Department has given guidance on criteria for speed limits to all highway authorities through circulars roads 1/80 and 4/83. The guidance is advisory but is widely respected and followed. The aim is to achieve realistic speed limits which give a satisfactory balance between safety and the need for fast convenient travel.

Child Care

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what child care provision his Department provides for pre-school age children of the Department's employees; what child care provision, for school holiday and/or after school care, is provided for employees' children aged five and over; what plans there are for increasing provision in the next five years; and how these are to be funded.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Centre at Swansea runs an annual summer holiday play scheme for children of school age. An experimental child care acheme was held at the Cardington residential training centre for two weeks in August 1987. The Department is considering what scope there is for further provision without continuing subsidy.

Bus Services (London)

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any plans to introduce legislation to deregulate bus services in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: It remains our intention to extend bus deregulation to London in the early 1990s.

Transport Supplementary Grant

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list in the *Official Report* for each highway authority in England the percentage of each authority's bid for transport supplementary grant that is attributable to minor works for 1987-88 and 1988-89.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information is given in the following table.

Percentage of total bid for Transport Supplementary Grant attributable to minor works

Authority	1987-88 percentage	1988-89 percentage
London boroughs		
City of London	100·0	100·0
Barking and Dagenham	6·8	13·2
Barnet	100·0	100·0
Bexley	45·1	27·5
Brent	80·3	55·9
Bromley	61·8	15·8
Camden	100·0	100·0

Authority	1987-88 percentage	1988-89 percentage
Croydon	100·0	97·5
Ealing	26·3	29·6
Enfield	1·5	0·9
Greenwich	16·1	16·7
Hackney	100·0	100·0
Hammersmith and Fulham	100·0	100·0
Haringey	0·0	3·8
Harrow	17·5	8·8
Havering	0·0	1·4
Hillingdon	16·6	23·1
Hounslow	48·2	23·0
Islington	100·0	47·4
Kensington and Chelsea	39·5	20·7
Kingston upon Thames	14·8	15·1
Lambeth	100·0	100·0
Lewisham	81·7	47·1
Merton	3·8	7·0
Newham	53·9	41·1
Redbridge	33·7	78·1
Richmond upon Thames	100·0	100·0
Southwark	30·5	23·3
Sutton	13·4	20·9
Tower Hamlets	97·4	89·0
Waltham Forest	9·7	64·1
Wandsworth	36·9	81·2
Westminster	20·5	8·7
Metropolitan districts		
Bolton	2·4	7·4
Bury	71·7	31·5
Manchester	43·9	38·2
Oldham	100·0	41·9
Rochdale	100·0	100·0
Salford	12·6	8·5
Stockport	84·1	84·0
Tameside	88·8	62·4
Trafford	9·4	40·7
Wigan	8·9	14·9
Knowsley	86·6	88·3
Liverpool	32·7	48·4
St. Helens	83·6	21·1
Sefton	62·1	23·8
Wirral	59·8	10·7
Barnsley	47·8	55·5
Doncaster	54·6	43·0
Rotherham	95·8	100·0
Sheffield	53·1	42·3
Gateshead	64·5	16·8
Newcastle upon Tyne	33·9	16·7
North Tyneside	94·4	96·0
South Tyneside	49·1	54·3
Sunderland	58·3	53·1
Birmingham	19·5	31·0
Conventry	11·3	14·1
Dudley	51·8	54·0
Sandwell	41·8	17·9
Solihull	42·0	37·6
Walsall	27·6	15·0
Wolverhampton	20·1	14·9
Bradford	18·0	25·4
Calderdale	100·0	100·0
Kirklees	42·6	29·8
Leeds	83·4	41·4
Wakefield	93·6	91·0
Shire Counties		
Avon	35·7	15·8
Bedfordshire	3·4	6·1
Berkshire	11·2	10·9
Buckinghamshire	0·8	4·1
Cambridgeshire	7·4	1·9
Cheshire	16·7	16·0
Cleveland	25·5	11·0
Cornwall	20·6	17·1
Cumbria	80·8	30·1
Derbyshire	41·0	41·0
Devon	17·3	16·2
Dorset	14·4	16·7
Durham	27·3	45·7
East Sussex	47·8	23·8
Essex	7·5	5·8
Gloucestershire	17·0	24·6
Hampshire	9·3	13·0
Hereford & Worcester	16·0	35·4
Hertfordshire	3·8	6·7
Humberside	29·5	9·7
Isle of Wight	75·8	87·0
Kent	14·6	18·2
Lancashire	8·9	8·9
Leicestershire	21·0	13·3
Lincolnshire	19·1	58·9
Norfolk	28·6	22·5
Northamptonshire	21·6	12·5
Northumberland	12·8	61·1
North Yorkshire	18·1	23·5
Nottinghamshire	34·4	29·1
Oxfordshire	14·6	8·7
Shropshire	8·7	30·4
Somerset	23·5	8·8
Staffordshire	25·6	38·7
Suffolk	15·0	13·5
Surrey	12·5	13·7
Warwickshire	27·7	34·0
West Sussex	9·3	8·9
Wiltshire	12·3	42·7

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list in the *Official Report* for each highway authority in England the percentage of each authority's bid for transport supplementary grant and its transport supplementary grant allocation attributable to roads on the primary route network, for 1987-88 and 1988-89.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information is given in the following table for major schemes (each costing over £1 million). Equivalent data including minor works could be prepared only at disproportionate cost.

(1) and *(3)* Percentage of bid for major schemes (costing over £1 million) which is attributable to roads on primary route network (including designated roads in London) for respective years.

(2) and *(4)* Percentage of expenditure accepted for transport supplementary grant for major schemes (costing over £1 million) which is attributable to roads on primary route network (including designated roads in London) for respective years.

	1987-88		1988-89	
Authority	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
London boroughs				
City of London	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Barking and Dagenham	0·2	0·0	0·0	0·0
Barnet	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Bexley	30·2	0·0	40·3	46·3
Brent	95·5	100·0	100·0	100·0
Bromley	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Camden	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Croydon	0·0	0·0	100·0	0·0
Ealing	80·6	100·0	90·3	100·0
Enfield	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Greenwich	94·9	100·0	95·0	100·0
Hackney	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Hammersmith and Fulham	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Haringey	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Harrow	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Havering	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Hillingdon	0·0	0·0	5·1	0·0
Hounslow	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0

Authority	1987-88 (1)	1987-88 (2)	1988-89 (3)	1988-89 (4)
Islington	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Kensington and Chelsea	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Kingston upon Thames	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Lambeth	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Lewisham	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Merton	11·2	26·7	17·9	26·7
Newham	59·2	59·2	56·8	56·8
Redbridge	0·0	0·0	100·0	100·0
Richmond upon Thames	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Southwark	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Sutton	48·9	100·0	57·9	100·0
Tower Hamlets	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Waltham Forest	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Wandsworth	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Westminster	19·9	100·0	68·9	100·0
Metropolitan Districts				
Bolton	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Bury	30·0	100·0	0·0	0·0
Manchester	89·4	84·3	100·0	100·0
Oldham	0·0	0·0	100·0	100·0
Rochdale	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Salford	100·0	100·0	99·8	100·0
Stockport	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Tameside	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Trafford	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Wigan	59·6	59·6	23·6	23·6
Knowsley	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Liverpool	98·8	98·6	100·0	100·0
St. Helens	100·0	0·0	100·0	100·0
Sefton	45·5	0·0	21·0	0·0
Wirral	6·3	0·0	6·6	2·7
Barnsley	100·0	100·0	92·6	91·5
Doncaster	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Rotherham	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Sheffield	41·1	41·1	13·2	6·2
Gateshead	0·0	0·0	34·2	30·6
Newcastle upon Tyne	24·2	29·4	25·2	38·3
North Tyneside	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
South Tyneside	55·4	55·4	32·1	90·0
Sunderland	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Birmingham	98·7	100·0	94·6	100·0
Coventry	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Dudley	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Sandwell	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Solihull	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Walsall	100·0	100·0	99·6	100·0
Wolverhampton	91·0	89·2	100·0	100·0
Bradford	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Calderdale	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Kirklees	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Leeds	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Wakefield	100·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Shire Counties				
Avon	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Bedfordshire	14·7	13·1	5·6	0·0
Berkshire	0·0	0·0	18·6	21·6
Buckinghamshire	78·0	77·4	58·3	28·0
Cambridgeshire	97·7	97·6	55·6	83·7
Cheshire	82·4	76·2	98·2	97·7
Cleveland	84·0	100·0	83·8	82·7
Cornwall	87·9	100·0	100·0	100·0
Cumbria	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Derbyshire	41·5	41·5	87·2	87·2
Devon	37·4	27·1	48·4	45·9
Dorset	94·3	98·9	69·6	91·9
Durham	82·5	80·9	79·2	80·6
East Sussex	88·0	100·0	66·2	71·1
Essex	91·4	99·4	84·5	84·2
Gloucestershire	39·7	53·2	20·4	42·5
Hampshire	37·8	41·0	10·8	12·5
Hereford & Worcester	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Hertfordshire	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Humberside	90·2	98·7	47·1	51·9
Isle of Wight	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Kent	30·2	19·0	58·8	61·3
Lancashire	76·2	91·6	53·9	80·0
Leicestershire	59·6	53·3	74·1	74·1
Lincolnshire	98·1	100·0	97·4	100·0
Norfolk	97·5	100·0	60·2	100·0
Northamptonshire	99·4	100·0	99·7	100·0
Northumberland	58·4	48·4	27·9	0·0
North Yorkshire	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Nottinghamshire	82·9	91·9	85·5	99·3
Oxfordshire	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Shropshire	88·5	88·2	100·0	100·0
Somerset	67·7	68·1	91·1	90·2
Staffordshire	61·4	54·0	56·9	67·9
Suffolk	38·7	96·7	70·1	67·1
Surrey	13·9	3·2	16·5	19·3
Warwickshire	46·8	59·0	41·9	41·9
West Sussex	97·1	100·0	95·5	100·0
Wiltshire	63·2	72·2	75·2	100·0

Fares

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any information about the likely change in the number of *(a)* bus, *(b)* coach and *(c)* rail passengers carried as fare levels change; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Department does not itself publish general data on the effects of fare changes on public transport passenger levels. This information is available from various sources such as London Regional Transport and some passenger transport executives. Also, fom time to time, university research departments publish studies and the Department's Transport and Road Research Laboratory issued a wide ranging collection of evidence in 1980. However, where the Department is involved in individual investment decisions an examination is undertaken of the elasticities involved, in particular the interaction between public transport fares and road traffic congestion levels.

London City Airport

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what application has been made to him by the Civil Aviation Authority to permit experimental flights of jet aircraft to or from London City airport; what response has been made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend has received no application and does not expect one. Permission for such flights is not within his jurisdiction.

Airline Competition Policy

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the status of the 1984 White Paper on airline competition policy following the British Airways takeover of B-Cal; and if he has any plans to publish a new statement of policy.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Government's objectives remain as set out in the 1984 airline competition policy White Paper:

—to encourage a sound and competitive multi-airline industry;

—to promote competition in all markets.

— to ensure adequate safeguards against anti-competitive behaviour by airlines.

The Civil Aviation Authority is considering the responses to its consultation on its revised statement of air transport licensing policies, which takes account of recent developments including the BA/B.CAL merger. My right hon. Friend has no plans at present to publish a further statement.

Heavy Goods Vehicles (Overloading)

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has plans to review the adequacy of the current level of penalties to deter heavy goods vehicle operators from overloading, in relation to the profitable nature of the offence.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The level of fines imposed by the magistrates courts for overloading offences usually falls far short of the maximum provided by statute.

Seriously overloaded vehicles are prohibited from proceeding until they have been unloaded. This provides a deterrent.

In the case of habitual offenders the traffic commissioners can revoke or curtail an operator's licence. On 150 occasions last year overloading was one of the grounds for such action.

During 1988-89 the Department's traffic examiners plan to weigh nearly 100,000 goods vehicles, an increase of 35 per cent. compared with 1987-88.

EMPLOYMENT

Training Commission Projects (Grants)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his reply of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *302*, if he will list the projects covered in each region by the Manpower Services Commission's local grants to employers programme, distinguishing between training and consultancy grants.

Mr. Cope: This information is not available. Information about projects to support individual employers is confidential for commercial reasons.

Disabled Persons

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give details of the number of employers against whom legal action has been taken over the last five years in connection with the quota scheme of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944.

Mr. Lee: There have been no prosecutions under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 in the last five years. The last prosecution was in 1975.

Lime Spraying

Mr. Allan Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information his Department has about the health and safety requirements for the spraying of lime and other potentially dangerous substances in residential areas.

Mr. Nicholls: When the spraying of lime and other potentially dangerous substances in residential areas is carried out as part of a work activity it is subject to the general requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and, in the case of pesticides, the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will state the current unemployment and unfilled vacancies figures on his Department's register for the travel-to-work areas of Ashford, Canterbury, Dover and Folkestone, respectively.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. The table shows the number of unfilled vacancies (excluding community programme vacancies) at job-centres covering areas closely corresponding to the Ashford, Canterbury, Dover and Deal and Folkestone travel-to-work areas on 4 March 1988, together with the total number of unemployed claimants in each travel-to-work area on 10 March 1988.

Travel-to-work area	*Unfilled vacancies*	*Unemployed claimants*
Ashford	727	2,328
Canterbury	914	3,873
Dover and Deal	590	3,551
Folkestone	529	3,625

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Cells (Escaped Prisoners)

13. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners remanded to police cells escaped between 1 January and 31 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The police inform me that the information available, which may not be complete, records that 15 such prisoners escaped during that period.

Television Programmes (Content)

14. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the British Broadcasting Corporation and independent television companies about the family viewing content of television programmes broadcast before 9 pm

Mr. Renton: We have discussions with the broadcasting authorities from time to time on a wide range of issues, including their responsibility for programme standards. In this context, my right hon. Friend met the chairmen of the BBC and IBA on 29 September 1987 in order to discuss the portrayal of violence and sex on television. The broadcasting authorities have issued guidance on these matters, including advice on the timing of programmes and the care which needs to be taken when children and young persons are likely to be viewing.

Neighbourhood Watch Schemes

15. **Mr. Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to monitor the change in the incidence of residential burglaries in areas where neighbourhood watch schemes have been established; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: Where police forces have been able to isolate crime figures to areas covered by individual schemes the results have indicated that well-run schemes can reduce the level of local crime including residential burglary. For

example, neighbourhood watch schemes were established in the five towns project area in north Tyneside. By the end of the first 18 months of the project, residential burglary was down by 23 per cent. and crime overall was reduced by 18 per cent. Given that there are now over 50,000 schemes in England and Wales, it would not be practical for the Home Office to collect such results centrally, but we are considering proposals for a study in one police force area of the effectiveness of neighbourhood watch schemes in preventing crime.

21. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a further statement on the spread and achievements of the neighbourhood watch movement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are now more than 50,000 neighbourhood watch schemes in England and Wales, almost double the figure 12 months ago. With so many schemes there is inevitably a variation in their size, scope and in the commitment of their members and, like all voluntary activity, some schemes are more effective than others. There are, however, many examples of schemes where crime has been reduced in neighbourhood watch areas coupled with an equally important enhancement, or revival of community spirit.

Solvent Abuse

16. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to make solvent abuse a criminal offence.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. We share the view of most professionals in this field that to criminalise solvent misuse would be counter-productive and likely to deter misusers from seeking the help they need.

Drug Misuse

17. **Mr. McLoughlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the work of the ministerial group on the misuse of drugs.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The ministerial group on the misuse of drugs, which I chair, continues to develop the Government's strategy to reduce both the supply of and demand for illicit drugs. Recent measures include improved international co-operation, strengthened enforcement by Customs and police, and increased prevention measures in the health and education fields.

Drug Trafficking

18. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the steps being taken by the Government to strengthen the capability of the police to combat drug trafficking.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Police resources for drugs enforcement have been substantially increased in recent years. All police forces now have drugs squads employing in total more than 850 police officers. Seventeen dedicated drugs wings have recently been added to regional crime squads with 221 additional police officers to man them. The national drugs intelligence unit has been strengthened and further expansion is planned for this financial year. The Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 provides the police with vital new investigative powers which are now being used to good effect.

38. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to combat drug trafficking.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave today to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin) and to the reply I gave to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) on 17 March 1988 at column *656*.

Terrorists (TV and Radio Interviews)

19. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will introduce legislation prohibiting television or radio interviews with members of terrorist organisations along the lines of the example set by the Government of the Republic of Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: I have no plans at present to introduce legislation prohibiting television or radio interviews with members of terrorist organisations.

Fraud

20. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will review the law on fraud; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Several aspects of the law on fraud are currently being reviewed by the Law Commission, and we shall give careful consideration to its recommendations.

26. **Mr. Nicholas Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Government action to improve the investigation and prosecution of fraud cases.

Mr. John Patten: Many of the reforms which the Roskill committee proposed have been enacted in the Criminal Justice Act 1987. They include creation of the serious fraud office, equipped with extensive investigatory powers and an expert staff, which became operational earlier this month; and changes in court procedure for complex fraud cases which we hope to bring into effect later this year.

In the Criminal Justice Bill we are proposing further measures, including changes to the law of evidence, which will help to bring fraudsters to justice.

Crime Prevention

22. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what response he has received to the new crime prevention advertising campaign.

Mr. Renton: The first phase of this three-year advertising campaign is only now drawing to a close and it is too early to draw conclusions about its effectiveness. We shall be better able to do this when we have the results of the market research we have commissioned. However, we have already received 176,000 requests for the crime prevention handbook featured in the advertising and 450,000 copies are being issued in response. The handbook is being reprinted.

Crime Detection

23. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on steps being taken to increase the crime detection rate.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In 1987, the overall clear-up rate rose from 32 per cent. to 33 per cent. Operational decisions about the investigation of crime are a matter for chief officers. They are adopting a range of strategies, including crime screening and administrative support units, to help target resources more effectively. The Home Office is supporting work to improve the quality of the scientific and technological support available to the police. But in seeking to prevent and detect crime the police also need the help of the whole community. The Government's new crime prevention advertising campaign is aimed at encouraging individuals and groups to involve themselves in this task. Better prevention of crime will allow the police to concentrate resources on the detection of more serious offences.

Association of Chief Police Officers

24. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what subjects he discussed at his last meeting with the Association of Chief Police Officers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend and I last met representatives of the Association of Chief Police Officers on 24 March. The Metropolitan police were also represented. We discussed the problems caused by the need to accommodate prisoners in police cells.

Leicestershire Police Authority

25. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what response he has made to the request from the Leicestershire police authority for a higher police establishment; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Police Authority has been informed that its application will be considered in the light of advice from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary along with applications from other authorities for increases in establishment in 1988-89.

Judith Ward (Trial Evidence)

27. **Mr. Caborn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the review of the written evidence of Dr. Frank Skuse at the trial of Judith Ward, carried out by the director of the Chorley forensic science laboratory.

35. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the outcome of the review by the director of the Chorley forensic science laboratory of the evidence of Dr. Frank Skuse at the trial of Judith Ward.

Mr. John Patten: A review of Dr. Skuse's written evidence at the trial of Judith Ward was carried out by the then director, Chorley forensic science laboratory, in 1985, as part of a review of Dr. Skuse's evidence in some 350 cases, dating back to 1966. The director concluded that there were no grounds for suspecting that Dr. Skuse's work in any of these cases had led to any miscarriage of justice.

41. **Mr. Meale:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what scientific tests were carried out by Dr. Frank Skuse to determine the presence of explosives on the person of Judith Ward.

Mr. John Patten: Dr. Skuse carried out the following tests to determine the presence of explosives on the person of Judith Ward:

The Griess Test
Mass spectrometry
Thin layer chromatography (TLC)
Tests for ammonium and nitrate ions.

45. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the review of the evidence of Dr. Frank Skuse at the trial of Judith Ward carried out by the director of the Chorley forensic science laboratory included Dr. Skuse's oral evidence.

Mr. John Patten: No. Mr. Walker, the then director of the laboratory, examined the written material which was available at the laboratory, which included Dr. Skuse's written statement. In any case, I understand that no transcript of Dr. Skuse's oral evidence is available; as none appears to have been produced.

Broadcasting (Restrictive Practices)

28. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to meet the chairman of the board of governors of the British Broadcasting Corporation to discuss restrictive practices in broadcasting.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. Friend has meetings with the chairman of the board of governors of the British Broadcasting Corporation from time to time at which various issues are discussed. No meeting is planned specifically to discuss restrictive practices in broadcasting.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment announced on 28 March that questions as to possible restrictive practices in television broadcasting and film production were being referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Civil Defence

29. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to improve the communications network between the emergency regional government centres in the event of a nuclear attack.

Mr. John Patten: The emergency communications network, which includes links between regional Government headquarters in wartime, is being extended and improved. Particular attention is being paid to the potential effects of the nuclear electromagnetic pulse.

Visas

30. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he intends to take in relation to the system of visas, so as to stop the exploitation and abuses of immigrant workers by some employers.

Mr. Renton: Immigration control measures can have only a limited effect on employment abuses in this country. If, however, the hon. Member has particular instances or proposals in mind, perhaps he would write to me with the details.

Knives (Criminal Offences)

31. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress in implementing his proposals to combat the increase of offences involving the use of knives.

Mr. John Patten: We have added to the Criminal Justice Bill a new provision making it an offence to be in possession of a bladed or sharply pointed article in a public place without good reason, with the onus on the carrier to show that he has such a reason. This represents a considerable strengthening of the law and will make it easier for the police to deal with people they find carrying knives. The Bill is expected to receive Royal Assent in the summer.

Remand Accommodation (Privatisation)

32. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent consideration he has given to employing the private sector to relieve overcrowding in the remand sector.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement on prisons which my right hon. Friend made to the House on 30 March at columns 1083-85. He announced then our intentions, as part of the measures we are taking to deal with the current and projected growth in the population, to invite the private sector to make proposals for the faster provision of urban remand facilities and open prisons, to publish a Green Paper and set up a consultancy on the scope for involving the private sector in all aspects of the remand system, and to examine the possibility of the private sector providing and managing secure bail hostels.

Crime Statistics

33. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of crimes involving the use of firearms in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what was the comparable total 10 and 20 years previously.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The number of notifiable offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales" copies of which are available in the Library. Table 3.1 in the issue for 1986 (Cm. 233) gives figures for 1976 to 1986 inclusive. Comparable figures are not available before 1969, and figures for 1987 are not available yet.

Auto Crime

34. **Mr. Sims:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of crime in 1987 was accounted for by the theft of, or from, vehicles; and what measures he is taking to reduce auto crime.

Mr. John Patten: In 1987, offences of theft of, and from, motor vehicles accounted for 26·9 per cent. of the total number of notifiable offences recorded by the police in England and Wales.

Last November, the Home Office standing conference on crime prevention set up a working group to consider the prevention of car crime. Rover Group, which is represented on the working group, has offered to produce a thief-proof concept car, incorporating a range of the latest technology in car security, for display at this year's standing conference in December.

Three parts of a British Standard on vehicle security (mechanical locking systems, security of in-car entertainment equipment, and window etching) have been published and further parts are due to be published shortly. We are seeking to have the British Standard adopted as a European Community directive.

Our new crime prevention publicity campaign, launched last month, includes information on car crime and the scope for preventing it.

Birmingham Pub Bombing

36. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which of the police officers who gave evidence at the original Birmingham pub bombing trial have since been imprisoned for criminal offences; and for what offences.

44. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the police officers who gave evidence against the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings have subsequently been convicted of assaulting suspects with a view to obtaining a confession.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Of the 57 officers who gave written or oral evidence at the trial, none is currently suspended from duty. One, a police constable at the time involved in escort duties, but not in interviewing suspects, and who gave oral evidence, was subsequently, as a sergeant, convicted at Birmingham Crown court on 1 November 1983 of assault occasioning actual bodily harm. The victim was a suspect arrested on suspicion of theft. The officer was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment, six months of which were suspended. He was dismissed from the force.

46. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 March, *Official Report*, column *1212*, before which police force he proposes that those hon. Members with evidence of alleged collusion between the two principal Crown witnesses, Dr. Frank Skuse and Superintendent George Reade, at the recent Appeal Court hearing of the Birmingham pub bombings case, should lay such evidence.

Mr. John Patten: The responsibility for investigating alleged offences rests with the police force in whose area the offence occurred. It will be for that force to seek assistance from any other force as necessary. In the case to which the hon. Member refers I understand the alleged offence may have occurred in the City of London.

Rape

37. **Mr. Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further actions he proposes to seek to reduce the incidence of the crime of rape; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on 13 April at column *145*.

Police Cells (Remanded Persons)

39. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were being held on remand in police cells on Monday 18 April.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On Monday 18 April 1,161 male prisoners, most of whom would have been on remand, were held in police cells in England and Wales; no women were being held.

Fines (Non-payment)

40. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of non-payment of fines were before the courts in 1987 and 1980.

Mr. John Patten: The information is not recorded centrally.

Pensioners (TV Licences)

42. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now introduce legislation providing free television licences for all pensioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: There are no plans to do so.

Football Matches (Policing Costs)

43. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to provide information on those policing costs of football matches which are not recouped from the clubs.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. It is for chief officers of police to decide, in the light of local circumstances, how many police officers should be deployed outside the ground at football matches. Information on the costs of providing this service could not be collected centrally without disproportionate cost.

Immigration (Correspondence)

47. **Mr. Bidwell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on what recent steps he has taken to reduce delays in dealing with immigration and nationality department correspondence.

48. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to reduce the amount of time his Department takes to answer letters from right hon. and hon. Members and to reduce the delays at Lunar House.

Mr. Renton: With regard to the delay at Lunar house, I refer the hon. Member and my hon. Friend to my reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) on 19 April at column *410*.

West Midlands (Chief Constable)

49. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the chief constable of the west midlands; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State visited the West Midlands police on 11 December 1987, and my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State visited the force on 25 February. On each occasion a number of policing matters were discussed with the chief constable.

14-year-old Boys (Custody)

50. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criminal justice policy objectives are secured by keeping 14-year-old boys in penal custody; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The courts must have the powers they need to deal suitably with offenders. It is desirable to use non-custodial disposals for offenders under 17 whenever possible. However, some juveniles, including a number of 14-year-old boys, commit serious offences for which in the last resort, only a custodial sentence is an adequate punishment.

Sunday Trading

51. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received since April 1986 favouring a liberalisation of Sunday trading; what evidence he has concerning the inconsistent enforcement of the existing law; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Between 15 April 1986 and 12 April 1988 we received 512 written representations, broadly in favour of liberalisation. We have some evidence on the pattern of enforcement in the country, but it is incomplete. I understand, however, that my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General has asked the Association of District Councils to obtain an authoritative picture of the enforcement effort undertaken by local authorities.

Dog Fights

52. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what priority he accords, in his overall policy towards law and order, to the elimination of illegal dog fights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Government share the public abhorrence of the barbaric practice of dog fighting. We therefore supported the Protection of Animals (Penalties) Act 1987 increasing the maximum penalties available for these and other offences against animals, and are supporting the Protection of Animals (Amendment) Bill to increase substantially the maximum penalties for attendance at animal fights or baiting.

Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis

53. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend last met the Commissioner, together with representatives of the London local authority associations, on Tuesday 19 April when they discussed his strategy for 1988.

Amusement Arcades

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* details

of the byelaws which have been made by local planning authorities under the Public Health Act 1961 in respect of amusement arcades; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: To date, only Westminster city council has made byelaws specifically to regulate amusement arcades. These were confirmed on 24 August 1987. We will shortly be consulting the local authority associations and the amusements industry on a scheme of model byelaws which it is proposed to issue for adoption by other district and borough councils.

Passports

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what complaints his Department has received concerning the telephones at the passport office in *(a)* London and *(b)* Peterborough being constantly engaged; what steps are being taken to provide more telephone lines and staff in order to reduce waiting times for renewal of passports; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is the average length of time now occurring between a United Kingdom passport being received in *(a)* the London office and *(b)* Peterborough and its being renewed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Correctly completed, non-urgent passport applications of all types are being dealt with within 54 working days at the London passport office and within 28 days at Peterborough. Urgent applications are given priority.

The difficulty of contacting passport offices by telephone is a frequent source of complaint. New telephone systems, with additional exchange lines for incoming calls, were installed at both London and Peterborough during 1987, and use is made at both offices of recorded message facilities to enable more calls to be handled. However, the number of calls received far exceeds the capacity of the systems and the provision of additional telephone lines alone would not solve the problem. Efforts are therefore being directed towards reducing the present delays in handling postal applications. I announced on 31 March in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) at column *679*, a number of special measures to help achieve this, including the recruitment of additional staff. Over 30 additional casual staff have since been recruited at the London office. At Peterborough, where space is limited, an additional 10 staff are being recruited.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why Mr. and Mrs. David Guyatt of 134, Shoebury Road, Thorpe Bay, Essex, who submitted a passport application, ref. 2/0402/03, on 3 February, have not yet received their passports despite a number of letters and inquiries about the urgency of the case for business purposes; and if he will take steps to ensure that they now receive their passports.

Mr. Renton: The passports were posted on 19 April.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement giving his Department's definition and a full explanation of the phrase "class of firearm" as used in his Department's various letters and circulars concerning the administration of the Firearms Act 1968.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Department has regard to the ordinary use of the words to which the hon. Member refers and to the relevant provisions of the Firearms Act.

Risley Detention Centre

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many category A prisoners are at present held on remand at Risley detention centre; to how many strip searches they have been subjected in February and March, giving the number of persons involved, the number of times each person was searched and if any prison contraband, smuggled item or illegal correspondence was discovered in any search, indicating which items; in how many cases prisoners refused to be searched and had to be restrained while a search was being conducted; and what were the reasons for the search under each of the following headings: *(a)* making a remand appearance at court, *(b)* attending a trial, *(c)* inter-prison visit and *(d)* other reasons.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 19 April, there were seven inmates on remand at Risley remand centre who had been placed in category A. Comprehensive records of strip searches are available only in respect of category A women prisoners, of whom there was one in Risley on the date in question. This prisoner was strip-searched on 14 occasions in February and on four occasions in March in connection with her appearances at remand hearings; and on five occasions in February and on three occasions in March following visits. No unauthorised article was discovered on any of these occasions. On no occasion did the prisoner refuse to be strip-searched.

Durham Prison

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many category A women prisoners there were in Her Majesty's prison, Durham, in February and March, respectively; and how many strip searches were made on these prisoners in that month, indicating strip searches before and after consultation with legal advisers, after visits and after cell changes, wing searches and cell searches, and listing reasons why the searches were carried out and any illegal contraband or smuggled items found.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: During February and March, there were three category A women prisoners in Durham prison. The number of occasions on which each was strip searched during each month is shown in the table:

	Inmate A		*Inmate B*		*Inmate C*	
	February	*March*	*February*	*March*	*February*	*March*
After legal visits						
After other visits		2		3	1	

	Inmate A		*Inmate B*		*Inmate C*	
	February	*March*	*February*	*March*	*February*	*March*
At the time of cell change and wing and cell searches	1	1	1	1	1	1
Other	—	—	—	—	—	2

No unauthorised article was found on any of the three women. I set out the reasons for such searches in my reply to a question from the hon. Member on 15 January at column *446*.

David Garton

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what correspondence he has received from Burton Copeland, solicitors on behalf of David Garton, a remand prisoner at Strangeways prison, Manchester; when the letters were received and when replies were sent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have received five letters from Messrs. Burton Copeland dated respectively 15 and 28 January, 4 and 18 February and 17 March. All were delivered within a few days of posting. They were all acknowledged on receipt, and a substantive reply was sent on 20 April. I very much regret they were not answered sooner.

PRIME MINISTER

EC (Surplus Food and Wine)

Q37. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the current level of expenditure on disposing of surplus food and wine stocks; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

Good progress is being made on translating into legal texts the agreements reached at the last European Council for bringing budget discipline into the agricultural sector.

NATO

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to her reply to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), 4 March, *Official Report*, column 1286, if she will indicate what role conventional weapons play in North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and United Kingdom defences.

The Prime Minister: NATO has to be able to respond to a threat at any level and strong conventional forces are an essential part of its ability to do so.

Royal Family (Security)

Mr. Dickens: To ask the Prime Minister if she is satisfied with the steps taken to ensure that adequate security arrangements are made for the safety of members of the Royal Family when they are passing through the middle east by air or landing for refuelling; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I am satisfied that the greatest care is taken to ensure the safety of members of the Royal Family on all overseas visits.

Cyprus

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer on Cyprus by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) on 18 April, *Official Report*, column *298*, if she will give examples of the good will gestures by all the parties which she put to the Prime Minister of Turkey.

The Prime Minister: My discussions with the Turkish Prime Minister were of course confidential. But the right hon. Gentleman will be aware from his recent contacts with the leaders of both sides in Cyprus of the sorts of gestures which will meet each side's concerns about security and other matters.

Engagements

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 21 April.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 21 April.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 21 April.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Doctors and Dentists (Pay)

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the latest report by the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration.

The Prime Minister *[pursuant to her reply, 9 February 1988, c. 135]:* I am now in a position to make a statement on the latest reports of the pay review bodies. The 1988 reports of the review bodies on the pay of Nursing Staff, Midwives and Health Visitors, and Professions Allied to Medicine, the Doctors and Dentists, and the Armed Forces, and of the Top Salaries Review Body, have been published today. Copies are now available in the Vote Office. The Government are grateful to members of the review bodies for these reports and the time and care which they have put into their preparation.

The following table shows the increases in pay rates recommended by the review bodies, and their cost:

Review Body Reports	*Average increase per cent.*	*Range of increase per cent.*	*Cost*[1] *£ million*
Nurses, midwives and health visitors	15·3	[2]4·2 to 33·6	803
Professions allied to medicine	8·8	7·6 to 9·5	45
Doctors and dentists	7·9	[3]7·3 to 8·1	318
Armed Forces	6·4	2·5 to 7·3	232
Top Salaries			

Review Body Reports	Average increase per cent.	Range of increase per cent.	Cost[1] £ million
Senior civil servants and senior officers of the armed forces	5·4	5·2 to 5·5	5·5
Judiciary	7·4	[45]·3 to 11·9	

The increases recommended for nursing staff, midwives and health visitors include implementation in the autumn of a radical new grading structure to provide more attractive career prospects and proper recognition of qualifications, skills and responsibilities for staff directly involved in patient care. The review body's recommendations are on the basis that there should be an immediate interim payment of 4 per cent. from 1 April 1988 and that once the new structure has been introduced, consequential pay increases would be backdated to 1 April 1988.

The Government have decided to accept in full the review body's recommendations on nursing staff, midwives and health visitors. They have also decided that the increases recommended by the review bodies on the pay of Professions Allied to Medicine, Doctors and Dentists and the Armed Forces should be paid in full from 1 April 1988. The recommendations of the Top Salaries Review Body will be implemented as to 4 per cent. from 1 April 1988, with the balance from 1 October 1988.

The full cost of the awards for the Armed Forces Pay Review Body and Top Salaries Review Body groups will be met from within existing public expenditure programme totals for this year. In the case of the health service groups the Government have decided that the cost in excess of the allocation already made for this year should be met from the Reserve. They will provide an extra £749 million from the Reserve within the planned total of public expenditure for this year, of which £683 million will be added to health authority cash limits. The remaining £66 million is for the family practitioner services. Together with the increases in allocation already announced, the increase in provision for the National Health Service in 1988-89 over 1987-88 will therefore be £1,852 million.

The pay rates and scales resulting from the decisions will be promulgated as soon as possible for all the groups concerned. Pensions will be based on the salaries actually in payment in accordance with the principle set out in my written answer of 13 April 1984, at column *383*.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Government Revenue

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of Government revenue in 1985-86 and 1986-87 was raised from individuals or companies resident in tax districts in the north of England.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Income Tax and National Insurance

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will show for 1988-89 those ranges of earnings within which the burden of income tax plus national insurance is less than in 1978-79.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 12 April 1988]:* The percentage of income taken in income tax and national insurance contributions is lower in 1988-89 than in 1978-79 at all levels of earnings except those shown in the table. Average earnings are those for men in all occupations who work a full week and whose pay is unaffected by absence (estimated at £92·80 per week in 1978-79 and £244·70 per week in 1988-89).

Earnings where average rates of tax and national insurance contributions are higher in 1988-89 than in 1978-79
Percentages of average earnings
Married man wife not earning—17 to 19 and 29 to 67.
Single person—17 to 19, 29 to 38 and 43 to 52.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the amount of inheritance tax paid by tax units on marginal rates of income tax of *(a)* 60 per cent., *(b)* 55 per cent., *(c)* 50 per cent. and *(d)* 45 per cent. in 1987-88 and the projected amount of inheritance tax receipts for each of these categories in 1988-89 together with the amounts forgone as a result of the 1988-89 budget changes.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* I regret that this information is not available.

Political Parties

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for each year since 1979 the number of transfers to political parties made on or within one year of death where the sum involved was *(a)* between £50,000 and £100,000 and *(b)* in excess of £100,000.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* Details of transfers to political parties are not separately recorded, so it is not possible to give for any year the number of such transfers or the amounts involved.

ENERGY

Eastcroft District Heating Scheme, Nottingham

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to the reply of 12 April, what his Department has done in the past to encourage the Eastcroft district heating scheme in Nottingham.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Eastcroft scheme has been in operation for some 15 years and is well-established. In 1986 my Department was informed of problems faced by

tenants served by the scheme and was asked to support an investigation. Such a study would have added little to the existing knowledge of CHP in general. However, the operators were advised that grant aid might be available, under the energy efficiency survey scheme, towards certain of the costs involved. Nottingham city council has now applied for a grant under this scheme and its application is being considered.

Bradwell Nuclear Power Station

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, in the light of the findings of the nuclear installations inspectorate's long-term safety of the Bradwell nuclear power station, and of the design similarities with the Berkeley No. 1 reactor, he will direct the Central Electricity Generating Board not to recommence operation of that reactor; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Health and Safety Executive published its report on the findings of the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate's assessment of the CEGB's long-term safety review on Berkeley nuclear power station on 13 April 1988. The safety case for continued operation of the Berkeley reactors was assessed on its own merits and in the knowledge of the findings on Bradwell. The report generally confirms the adequacy of the existing safety case and raises no specific concern such that reactor operations cannot continue at present.

British Gas

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the cost to *(a)* the Government and *(b)* British Gas of having to buy back shares where a final instalment is not paid.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The cost of making repayments to investors in cases where the instalment is not paid will be met out of proceeds from reselling the shares in question on the market. There will therefore be no net cost to either British Gas or the Government.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many shareholders are there in British Gas *(a)* who have paid the final instalment and *(b)* who have not paid the final instalment.

Mr. Peter Morrison: On Sunday 17 April, some three quarters of the 2·85 million payments had been received. Considerable numbers have been coming in since.

WALES

Road Signs

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will state the total public expenditure on road signs on trunk roads and motorways in Wales in each year since 1966 at outturn and 1986-87 prices.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: This information is not available. Expenditure is incurred either as part of individual road scheme costs or as part of maintenance costs.

Pedestrian Bridge (Sandbank Road, Towyn Level Crossing)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet urgently the chairman of British Rail to discuss the reasons for the delay in installing the pedestrian bridge at the Sandbank road, Towyn level crossing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No. This is a matter for British Rail.

Rural Schools

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what further steps he proposes to take to encourage small rural schools in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I continue to be concerned that we should maintain and improve the quality of education in rural areas of Wales. The Government have given specific help, through education support grant, to improve the quality and range of curriculum provided in rural schools. The measures included in the Education Reform Bill are intended to improve the quality of education in all schools, including small rural ones, and my right hon. Friend will be monitoring the effects of its implementation. It is for local education authorities to determine in the context of falling school rolls how to preserve and enhance the quality of education in rural areas. My right hon. Friend has consulted the Welsh Joint Education Committee and the Welsh Counties Committee about a draft circular on "Educational Quality in Wales" which covers these matters among others; he is now considering their comments.

Education Reform

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the Welsh working group for the national curriculum.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I am pleased to announce that the professor of Welsh at the University college of North Wales, Professor Gwyn Thomas, has accepted the chairmanship of the group. Full membership will be announced shortly. A copy of the group's terms of reference has been placed in the Library of the House.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

South Africa

Mr. Steel: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what international obligations and undertakings restrict Her Majesty's Government's policy on promoting the export of computer technology to South African companies and institutions; and what information he has on comparable limitations accepted by other European Economic Community member states and the United States of America.

Mr. Alan Clark: In line with our EC and Commonwealth partners, the United Kingdom does not permit exports of computer equipment and other sensitive equipment to South African military, police or security forces; but, in accordance with our undertakings, we neither prevent nor discourage legitimate civil exports of computer technology to South Africa. Under the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act 1986, the United States has imposed a prohibition on the exports of computer equipment to certain entities of the Government of South Africa.

Scotch Whisky

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps his Department is taking to persuade the Korean authorities to allow bottled-in-Scotland Scotch whisky to be imported and available within the Korean domestic market.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Korean market is not fully open to exports of bottled-in-Scotland Scotch whisky. We press the Korean authorities on every suitable occasion, both bilaterally and through the EC, to remove the restrictions in this important sector. The Korean authorities have recently undertaken to liberalise the market as from 1 July 1989. We welcome this undertaking and are seeking full details of the proposed measures.

Postal Services (Industrial Disputes)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has as to how often industrial disputes have disrupted postal deliveries in the London postal districts during each of the last five years.

Mr. Butcher: Disruption to postal services from industrial disputes is primarily a matter for the Post Office Board. I do not have details of the position in London over the last five years. However, I have asked the chairman of the Post Office to write to my hon. Friend.

Working Breakfasts

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make it his policy to invite the hon. Member for Newham North-West to the next working breakfast at which inner-city policy for London will be discussed; when and where that breakfast will take place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The London action for cities working breakfast will take place at the Business Design Centre, Islington Green, on Wednesday 22 June. The presentations are aimed at business men and are carefully designed to encourage business participation in the regeneration of our cities. Space is limited and we seek to ensure that the audience consists only of business men, and those officials of public agencies directly involved in working with the private sector. I am afraid that it is not my intention to invite the hon. Member to attend, as the only effect would be to displace a business representative.

Royal Arms

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, why the Royal Arms no longer appear on the official notepaper of his office.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My official notepaper has been redesigned as part of a major exercise to improve communication between the DTI and business. This exercise is in support of the new objectives of the DTI set out in the White Paper "DTI – the department for Enterprise" which I presented to Parliament on 12 January 1988.

Regional Development Organisations

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will give a breakdown of payments for 1988-89 for regional development organisations by region; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire South-West (Mr. Page) on 11 March 1988 at columns 369-71.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has on the percentage of European Regional Development Fund moneys going to the different standard regions in the previous five years for which information is available; and if he will give similar projections for such future periods for which figures are available.

Mr. Atkins: The table sets out the percentage distribution of European regional development fund commitments during the period 1983 to 1987:

Region	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	[1]*1987*
North	12·5	10·5	7·3	11·3	14·2
Yorkshire and Humberside	5·9	13·9	6·2	11·6	7·6
East Midlands	1·6	1·2	5·2	0·6	0·6
South West	4·3	7·7	3·0	6·5	7·0
West Midlands	1·5	4·8	13·4	11·7	16·4
North West	16·1	15·5	21·6	13·8	9·2
Wales	18·0	15·5	16·5	13·1	13·6
Scotland	31·7	25·0	20·1	15·8	20·9
Northern Ireland	8·4	5·6	6·7	11·8	9·8
Multi-regional		—	—	3·8	0·7
TOTAL	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0

[1] Provisional.

It is not possible to make projections for 1988 or future years.

Timber

Ms. Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what advice his Department is giving to retailers, manufacturers, importers, architects, local authorities and other institutional users of tropical woods about the use of wood from unsustainable sources;

(2) if there are any plans to implement a code of conduct on the importation of non-sustainably produced tropical timber; and what initiatives are being taken to regulate the international trade in tropical timber;

(3) what action has been taken to encourage the development of markets for sustainable produced timber products;

(4) what advice his Department is giving to local authorities and other institutional users of tropical woods about the use of wood from unsustainable sources;

(5) what plans there are to support initiatives aimed at regulating the international trade in tropical timber in such a way as to ensure that only timber from sustainable sources is imported into Europe.

Mr. Atkins: The Government believe that solutions to depletion of the tropical rain forests are likely to be found only on a global basis. We have therefore positively supported the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO), whose objectives balance conservation and trade expansion and diversification. We believe that ITTO represents a suitable forum to consider and discuss the wide-ranging and complex issues involved, including the usage of sustainably produced timber. The Government hope that the ITTO will urgently address the questions of

sustainable utilisation and management of tropical forests (including achievement of generally accepted definitions in this area).

Israel (Trade)

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the current volume of United Kingdom-Israeli trade.

Mr. Alan Clark: For the first two months of 1988 the volume of United Kingdom-Israel trade, measured in value terms, was: exports £64·5 million, imports £79·8 million.

These figures should be treated with more than the usual caution because of major changes to customs procedures introduced in January 1988, details of which were given in a reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West, (Mr. Page) on 7 December 1987, at columns *34-5*.

Oil

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much crude oil, expressed in *(a)* volume and *(b)* cash terms was imported into the United Kingdom from (i) Iran and (ii) Iraq in each of the last five years; and what proportion of total imports from each country each figure represents.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information is given in the following table.

Imports from Iran and Iraq: 1983-87

	Crude Oil Volume thousand metric tonnes	*Value in £ million*	*Total Imports Value in £ million*	*Crude Oil as percentage of total*
Iran				
1983	510·3	67·7	102·2	66·2
1984	2,777·2	427·5	476·3	89·8
1985	618·7	97·3	147·0	66·2
1986	627·2	52·8	93·9	56·2
1987	2,175·2	176·2	236·6	74·5
Iraq				
1983	618·4	92·2	95·7	96·3
1984	413·4	67·0	76·9	87·1
1985	1,893·9	275·2	293·2	93·9
1986	3,083·7	219·0	249·5	87·8
1987	3,900·9	309·5	324·3	95·4

Source. Overseas Trade Statistics

Notes:

(i) Imports valued cif, country of origin (COO) basis.

(ii) Figures for 1986 and 1987 are provisional.

(iii) Crude oil defined as division 33 (part 333·0) in the *Overseas Trade Statistics*.

Inward Investment

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment has been made of the effectiveness of his Department's inward investment activities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 20 April 1988]:* The Invest in Britain Bureau (IBB) in my Department has a rolling programme of internal assessment for performance and value for money. Paid publicity and promotional material is assessed by independent research by consultants. Consultants are also employed to evaluate particular operational aspects, for example, the activities of the English regional development organisations that are part funded by my Department. The IBB, together with the agencies that it co-ordinates, have been successful and effective, as is shown by the United Kingdom's continuing to be the preferred European location for internationally mobile direct investment.

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his latest estimate of the number of jobs created in England, Wales and Scotland as a result of investment by United States companies since 1979.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 20 April 1988]:* The following are the Invest in Britain Bureau (IBB) figures for the number of jobs expected to be created or safeguarded, in the long term, by inward investment projects announced by United States companies in each year since 1979 (the earliest for which formal records are available) for England, Wales and Scotland. The figures are based on information provided by the companies themselves and include only those jobs associated with inward investment projects currently known to the IBB.

The number of jobs (created or safeguarded) associated with inward investment projects announced by US companies

	England		*Wales*		*Scotland*	
	Created	*Safeguarded*	*Created*	*Safeguarded*	*Created*	*Safeguarded*
1979	3802	n/a	382	n/a	1953	n/a
1980	3087	n/a	502	n/a	3208	n/a
1981	3337	n/a	776	n/a	5096	n/a
1982	3698	n/a	731	n/a	1956	n/a
1983	5653	5346	1056	2569	3652	2031
1984	3340	2264	2086	1636	7418	1367
1985	11572	5470	820	895	3778	2307
1986	5784	4055	1291	2090	1259	220
1987[1]	4283	2479	883	757	1519	261

[1] Provisional.

n/a = not available.

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the annual cost of the Invest in Britain Bureau since 1979; and how much of that expenditure was incurred in the United States of America.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 20 April 1988]:* The following are the figures for the annual cost of the Invest in Britain Bureau; full costs are available only from the financial year 1986-87.

Expenditure[1] on the Invest in Britain Bureau (£UK)

Year	*Total*	*North American Section*
1986-87	1,713	923
1987-88	1,837	823

[1] These figures include, for example, staff salary costs, travel and subsistence, entertainment, publicity material, advertising and promotional events, but exclude, accommodation costs and general overheads.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Disarmament

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give the reasons why the United Kingdom delegation to the United Nations Special Session on disarmament does not, as in 1978 and 1982, include a member of a non-governmental organisation; and if he will make it his policy to reconsider the position.

Mr. Mellor: There now exists a wider range of non-governmental organisations taking an interest in arms control issues than at the time of the first and second United Nations Special Sessions on Disarmament. Not all these groups share the same views on arms control and disarmament issues. We do not think it would be possible for a member of any one non-governmental organisation to be able to represent the views of all such groups. It would be invidious to try to make such a choice.

We recognise the need for liaison between the United Kingdom delegation and the non-governmental organisations attending the Special Session. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office disarmament adviser, David Summerhayes, will carry out this task. His experience as leader of the United Kingdom delegation to UNSSD II and his contact with the whole range of NGO opinion in this country are particularly relevant to his task.

Lebanon (British Hostages)

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to help to secure the release of Mr. Terry Waite, Mr. John McCarthy and other British nationals unaccounted for in Lebanon and who have been taken hostage or kidnapped.

Mr. Mellor: Her Majesty's embassy in Beirut is doing all it can, in very difficult circumstances, to acquire information on the British hostages in Lebanon. We are also in touch with middle eastern and other Governments who might be able to help.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Education Reform

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he will issue guidance on the provisions he would expect to be contained in the planning and delegation schemes for further education which local education authorities will be required to prepare under clause 121 of the Education Reform Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I am today issuing draft guidance on the provisions which I would expect to be contained in the schemes which local education authorities would be required to prepare under clause 121 of the Education Reform Bill if it receive Royal Assent in its present form. The draft guidance is being issued now in order to inform discussion of the further education clauses during the remaining stages of the Bill's passage through Parliament: to help local education authorities, colleges and others to prepare for the introduction of the further education planning, budget-setting and delegation procedures envisaged by the Bill; and to give all concerned an early opportunity to comment.

Copies of the draft guidance have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. They are also being sent to local education authorities, further and higher education colleges, and a range of interested bodies, with a request for any comments by 15 July 1988.

THE ARTS

Lindow Man

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Minister for the Arts how many individuals and organisations contacted him about Lindow Man; and how many of these argued the case for a location in the south-eastern region.

Mr. Luce: I was contacted about Lindow Man by 23 individuals and one organisation, all from the north-west. None argued the case for location in the south-east.

SCOTLAND

Michael Forsyth Ltd. and Michael Forsyth Associates

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all contacts by *(a)* Ministers in his Department and *(b)* civil servants in his Department with representatives of Michael Forsyth Ltd., Michael Forsyth Associates and subsidiaries thereof, in each of the past five years.

Mr. Rifkind: No Minister currently serving in the Scottish Office has had any official meetings with representatives of Michael Forsyth Ltd., Michael Forsyth Associates or any subsidiaries since taking up office. Nor have any of my officials had such a meeting in the last five years. Information about possible meetings with previous Scottish Office Ministers is not readily available.

Cervical Smear Tests

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to collect centrally information on the waiting time for cervical smear test

results in each laboratory in every health board in Scotland; what steps are taken to achieve consistency in this regard both within and between health boards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: As part of the monitoring of the introduction of a comprehensive cervical cancer screening programme in Scotland, I am arranging for this information to be collected centrally.

Electoral Register

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report*, using population changes for those aged 17 and over, the 1986 forecast of the expected percentage change of the number of people on the electoral register in Scotland for 1987-88.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The latest available projection is 1985-based and shows a change of plus 0·28 per cent. between mid-1987 and mid-1988 for the population of Scotland aged 17 and over.

Local Authorities (Capital Expenditure)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make a statement regarding the rejection by his Department's finance division of Grampian regional council's social work committee's request for an additional allocation to the region's capital programme in respect of voluntary-funded improvements to the regional council's homes for the elderly at Durnhythe, Portsoy and Rose Innes, Aberchirder;

(2) what criteria his Department uses when requiring funds from voluntary sources to be counted as part of local authorities' capital plans.

Mr. Lang: The rules as to the counting of capital expenditure by local authorities against the allocations issued to them are set out in guidance issued annually by my Department. In broad terms, capital expenditure incurred by local authorities must count against allocations, no matter how that expenditure is financed.

In circumstances such as those referred to there may be more than one way to achieve the desired result. I do not know why Grampian regional council has apparently chosen not to use such flexibility as is built into the system. My Department has written to remind it of the possibilities. I therefore see no case for issuing an additional capital allocation to the authority for these projects, and in any case the resources for 1988-89 have all been issued.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions in the last five years his Department has required that the costs of improvements to regional council homes met from funds from voluntary sources should be counted as part of the council's capital plan; and if he will give a breakdown by region.

Mr. Lang: The Government's rules covering capital expenditure by local authorities issued annually by my Department are set out in general terms and do not specify every eventuality. While my Department is ready to give advice on specific points, it is for authorities to satisfy themselves and their auditors that the rules are adhered to. Authorities' returns do not identify capital expenditure financed from voluntary sources.

Sporting Facilities

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of sporting facilities available to schoolchildren and youth clubs (i) in Scotland, (ii) in Strathclyde and (iii) in Glasgow; and how many of these are indoor facilities for swimming, tennis, gymnastics and athletics.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Comprehensive information about facilities in the public education sector is not recorded centrally. The Scottish Sports Council has recorded the following information about indoor facilities open to the public in Scotland.

Facilities purpose built for:	*Scotland*	*Strathclyde*	*Glasgow*
Swimming	135	60	16
Tennis	1	1	1
Athletics	1	1	1
Gymnastics	4	2	0
General purpose sports centres	59	24	5

Road Accident Statistics

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of road accidents resulting in deaths or serious injuries for each year since 1975 *(a)* in Scotland, *(b)* in the Strathclyde region and *(c)* in Glasgow.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is as follows:

	Scotland		*Strathclyde*		*Glasgow*	
	Fatal	*Serious*	*Fatal*	*Serious*	*Fatal*	*Serious*
1975	669	6,912	317	3,010	112	1,150
1976	687	6,923	287	2,644	114	887
1977	727	7,063	301	2,946	108	1,187
1978	739	7,442	323	2,983	115	1,350
1979	728	7,536	300	3,172	106	1,135
1980	644	7,218	251	3,072	76	1,038
1981	610	7,265	222	2,988	73	965
1982	640	7,421	247	3,055	71	941
1983	568	6,429	245	2,676	73	877
1984	537	6,547	213	2,833	70	1,005
1985	550	6,507	225	2,739	80	924
1986	537	6,182	210	2,563	57	849

Procurator Fiscal v. McAvennie, Roberts, Butcher and Woods

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has of the number of man-hours in *(a)* the Solicitor-General's office, *(b)* the Glasgow procurator fiscal's office and *(c)* of police time devoted to the case of Procurator Fiscal *v.* Messrs. McAvennie, Roberts, Butcher and Woods.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The estimated number of man-hours devoted to this case, including time spent in court and in responding to media and parliamentary interest, were as follows:

	Number
(a) Crown Office	7
(b) Procurator Fiscal's office, Glasgow	74
(c) Police	218

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the cost to public funds of the trial involving the Procurator Fiscal of Glasgow *v.* Messrs. McAvennie, Roberts, Butcher and Woods.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is not possible to quantify the costs involved.

Road Traffic Law (North Report)

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the Government's plans to consider the implications in Scotland of the North report on road traffic law.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport indicated in his reply on 12 April, at columns *79-80*, to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck), the Government welcome the report of the road traffic law review conducted under Dr. North's chairmanship and will be pressing on with consideration of its recommendations. Many of these are relevant to Scotland and we shall consider them in consultation with colleagues responsible for these matters in England and Wales.

Sheriff Courts

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by court the number of summary criminal cases dealt with in the sheriff court in Scotland in the last five years for which information is available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 April 1988]:* The number of accused persons proceeded against summarily in each of the sheriff courts in Scotland over the last five years was as follows:

Court	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Aberdeen	9,181	6,571	6,119	5,700	5,330
Airdrie	4,226	2,863	3,215	3,159	2,749
Alloa	1,586	1,192	1,299	1,128	1,124
Arbroath	1,734	1,119	1,150	1,308	1,244
Ayr	3,666	3,282	3,294	3,794	3,862
Banff	828	377	415	434	453
Campbeltown	332	298	281	325	305
Cupar	1,202	1,032	1,033	955	1,118
Dingwall	956	648	642	737	840
Dornoch	426	494	329	236	250
Dumbarton	4,011	3,527	3,564	3,574	3,665
Dumfries	6,193	5,179	6,249	5,347	4,868
Dundee	6,537	5,134	5,032	5,350	5,538
Dunfermline	3,843	2,947	2,784	3,146	2,990
Dunoon	1,232	1,220	1,222	1,077	980
Duns	443	255	246	225	228
Edinburgh	23,491	12,073	11,767	11,871	14,616
Elgin	1,793	1,318	1,338	1,431	1,426
Falkirk	4,987	3,099	3,166	3,558	3,105
Forfar	1,411	1,072	1,323	1,027	1,019
Fort William	433	530	559	536	586
Glasgow	15,553	18,227	15,320	9,490	11,752
Greenock	2,969	2,488	2,290	2,015	2,053
Haddington	1,594	1,172	1,315	1,231	1,052
Hamilton	9,297	6,167	6,578	5,982	6,010
Inverness	2,616	2,175	2,564	2,090	2,198
Jedburgh	831	402	525	484	497
Kilmarnock	6,637	5,433	4,767	5,691	5,687
Kirkcaldy	4,486	3,853	3,294	3,336	4,113
Kirkcudbright	280	223	252	338	357
Kirkwall	346	517	568	640	602
Lanark	1,514	880	1,204	1,040	1,042
Lerwick	531	536	683	563	531
Linlithgow	4,238	2,586	3,197	3,178	2,939
Lochmaddy	204	159	204	277	155
Oban	440	392	410	367	442
Paisley	6,000	5,330	6,750	6,801	6,008
Peebles	506	392	371	338	279
Perth	5,974	3,263	4,110	3,416	3,729
Peterhead	884	808	932	722	687
Portree	250	191	202	269	192
Rothesay	329	385	336	250	293
Selkirk	872	504	444	501	376
Stirling	3,420	2,526	3,023	3,380	3,029
Stonehaven	1,736	880	1,052	1,005	794
Stornoway	407	496	428	510	439
Stranraer	1,356	1,003	1,056	1,070	1,144
Tain	914	639	660	631	539
Wick	511	535	579	661	561
TOTAL	158,014	116,392	118,141	111,194	113,796

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by court the number of criminal cases dealt with by solemn procedure in the sheriff court in Scotland in the last five years for which information is available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 April 1988]:* The number of indictments initiated in each sheriff court in Scotland in the last five years is as follows:

Court	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Aberdeen	199	235	208	157	144
Airdrie	93	105	122	155	147
Alloa	10	15	22	18	11
Arbroath	36	25	32	41	21
Ayr	63	50	76	86	72
Banff	20	8	11	7	18
Cambeltown	1	4	1	4	3
Cupar	13	20	23	19	19
Dingwall	8	9	15	3	9
Dornoch	4	16	10	10	3
Dumbarton	54	68	51	66	54
Dumfries	44	45	43	66	76
Dundee	156	154	122	118	164
Dunfermline	74	57	54	50	57
Dunoon	10	13	16	18	14
Duns	2	1	1	9	2
Edinburgh	431	424	327	273	283
Elgin	25	29	21	26	32
Falkirk	60	60	41	51	68
Forfar	17	24	23	23	23
Fort William	5	5	2	2	3
Glasgow	1,057	1,088	994	857	990
Greenock	106	130	82	99	75
Haddington	13	4	7	12	3
Hamilton	147	140	159	166	181
Inverness	31	46	29	53	55
Jedburgh	9	13	12	13	10
Kilmarnock	137	112	111	97	91
Kirkcaldy	78	68	95	95	53
Kirkcudbright	9	8	11	7	9
Kirkwall	5	5	3	2	1
Lanark	14	16	6	9	18
Lerwick	3	12	2	3	1
Linlithgow	37	37	60	58	60
Lochmaddy	0	2	2	3	0
Oban	10	3	9	4	17
Paisley	152	196	152	96	118
Peebles	9	10	3	7	0
Perth	68	56	76	65	50
Peterhead	17	22	27	19	15
Portree	1	3	1	0	6
Rothesay	4	5	8	7	4
Selkirk	11	15	13	11	13
Stirling	31	48	39	36	30
Stonehaven	11	19	12	14	14
Stornoway	2	0	1	3	4
Stranraer	17	22	35	23	40
Tain	8	8	3	6	12
Wick	5	11	12	16	5
TOTAL	3,317	3,466	3,185	2,983	3,098

Health Boards (Finance)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the percentage change in total cash allocations to Scottish health boards for each year from 1978-79, after correcting for *(a)* National Health Service pay and prices and *(b)* demographic factors.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 26 January]:* The available information is given in the table. No separate NHS pay and price index is maintained for Scotland and the calculations have therefore been undertaken using the GDP deflator.

Year-on-year changes in allocations[1] to health boards

	(a) after adjustment using GDP deflator	*(b) after further adjustment for changes in demographic demand*
	percentage	*percentage*
1979-80	+4·8	+3·1
1980-81	+10·2	+9·6
1981-82	+1·2	+0·9
1982-83	+0·7	+0·9
1983-84	+0·9	+0·9

	(a) after adjustment using GDP deflator	*(b) after further adjustment for changes in demographic demand*
	percentage	*percentage*
1984-85	+1·9	+1·7
1985-86	−0·6	−1·2
1986-87	+4·3	+4·1

[1] Allocations for health boards' recurrent expenditure on hospital and community health services.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Pensioners

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will estimate the number of single pensioners *(a)* aged 65 to 79 years and *(b)* aged 80 years and over liable to income tax who both claim the age allowance and are in receipt of housing benefit who will receive reductions in housing benefit of (i) up to £1 per week, (ii) between £1 and £2 per week, (iii) between £2 and £3 per week, (iv) between £3 and £4 per week, (v) between £4 and £5 per week and (vi) £5 per week or over from 11 April; and how many in each age group will lose all entitlement to housing benefit;

(2) if he will estimate the number of pensioner couples claiming *(a)* the lower and *(b)* the higher age allowance and in receipt of housing benefit who will receive reductions in housing benefit of (i) up to £1 per week, (ii) £1 to £2 per week, (iii) £2 to £3 per week, (iv) £3 to £4 per week, (v) £4 to £5 per week and (vi) £5 per week and over from 11 April, and in each age group how many will lose all entitlement to housing benefit.

(3) if he will estimate the number of single pensioners and pensioner couples *(a)* aged between 65 and 79 years and *(b)* aged 80 years or over who receive both an age allowance and housing benefit who will be *(c)* better off and *(d)* worse off by (1) up to £1 per week, (2) £1 to £2 per week, (3) £2 to £3 per week, (4) £3 to £4 per week, (5) £4 to £5 per week, and (6) £5 per week and over when the increases in the age allowances and the housing benefit regulations 1987 take effect in April.

Mr. Portillo: The information requested is given in the tables.

Increases in entitlement[1]

(thousands)

Weekly amount	*Singles*[6] *65-79*	*80+*	*Couples* *65-79*	*80+*
1. up to £1	10	•	•	•
2. £1-2	10	•	•	•
3. £2-3	10	10	•	•
4. £3-4	•	•	•	•
5. £4-5	•	•	•	•
6. £5+	•	•	•	•
Total	30	10	•	•

Reductions in entitlement[1]

(thousands)

Weekly amount	*Singles*[6] *65-79*	*80+*	*Couples* *65-79*	*80+*
1. up to £1	50	10	40	10
2. £1-2	60	10	30	•
3. £2-3	50	20	40	•
4. £3-4	20	•	30	•
5. £4-5	10	•	10	•
6. £5+	30	•	10	•
Total	210	40	160	10
Numbers losing all entitlement[5]	140	40	100	10

• denotes a number of less than 10,000

Notes:

[1] Rounded to nearest 10,000.

[2] All who are liable to income tax are assumed to claim the age allowance and therefore the figures in the table are based on this assumption.

[3] Based on the "Impact of the Reformed Structure of Income Related Benefits" published in October 1987 and adjusted to take account of the 1988 Budget announcement.

[4] Totals may not add up exactly due to rounding.

[5] The numbers losing all entitlement are included in the table showing the weekly loss.

[6] All single pensioners in these tables will have a taxable income in excess of £56·92 per week and for couples it will be in excess of £89·90 per week.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will state the number of retirement pensioners *(a)* aged between 65 and 79 years and *(b)* aged 80 years and over who both pay income tax and receive housing benefit;

(2) if he will state the number of pensioners *(a)* aged between 65 and 79 years and *(b)* aged 80 years and over who both claim the age allowance and receive housing benefit.

Mr. Portillo: The numbers of retirement pensioners in Great Britain who both pay income tax and receive housing benefit during 1987-88, in the requested age bands, are estimated to be as follows:

	Number
Aged between 65 and 79 years	330,000
Aged 80 years and over	90,000

Notes:

1. Source: Family Expenditure Surveys 1984 and 1985.
2. Married or unmarried couples count as one unit.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will state the number of retirement pensioners *(a)* aged between 65 and 79 years and *(b)* aged 80 years and over who will both pay income tax and be entitled to housing benefit from 11 April.

Mr. Portillo: The information requested is as follows:

	Number
Aged between 65 and 79 years	130,000
Aged 80 years and over	30,000

Note:

1. Based on the "Impact of the Reformed Structure of Income Related Benefits" published in October 1987 and adjusted to take account of the 1988 Budget announcement.
2. Married and unmarried couples count as one unit.

Michael Forsyth Ltd.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all contacts by *(a)* Ministers in his Department and *(b)* civil servants in his Department with

representatives of Michael Forsyth Ltd., Michael Forsyth Associates and subsidiaries thereof, in each of the past five years.

Mr. Portillo: I have no knowledge of any contact at ministerial level with representatives of any of these companies. Civil servants in the Department had contacts with M. Forsyth Associates in 1983 and 1984 concerning routine national insurance contributions matters. There may have been other contacts with any of the companies on routine social security business during the five years, but no details are available.

Civil Defence

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services why Ministers have not yet approved for issue his Department's guidance for the organisation of the National Health Service in war; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: Ministers have already considered draft guidance on National Health Service responsibilities in civil defence and have asked for some amendments; an amended text has been considered by the Home Office, which has a co-ordinating role in emergency planning, and its advice will be taken into account in a further submission to Ministers.

Disabled People

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many persons were registered as disabled on 31 December 1984, 1985, 1986 and 1987; and how many of those aged between 16 and 65 years were *(a)* in full-time employment, *(b)* in part-time employment, *(c)* registered as unemployed and *(d)* known to the Department not to be in employment;

(2) how many persons registered as disabled, but not in employment, were in receipt of *(a)* unemployment benefit, *(b)* sickness and invalidity benefit, *(c)* supplementary benefit and *(d)* free prescriptions on each of 31 December 1984, 1985, 1986 and 1987.

Mr. Scott: The available information on the numbers of persons registered as disabled with local authorities in England (for the years specified) is set out in the table. I regret that the remaining information requested is not collected centrally. Figures for the rest of Great Britain are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Number of persons with disabilities registered with local authority social services departments (England)

Type of disability	*Year*[1]	*All persons*	*Persons aged 16-64 years*
Physically disabled (general classes)	1984	1,107,708	370,386
Blind or partially sighted	1986	191,652	41,304
Deaf or hard of hearing	1986	97,431	33,149

[1] All figures as at 31 March.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the cost to his Department of giving free prescriptions for persons registered as disabled but who do not qualify under the present regulations.

Mr. Newton: The information needed to make a reliable estimate is not available.

Child Care

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what child care provision his Department provides for pre-school age children of the Department's employees; what child care provision for school holidays and/or after-school care is provided for employees' children aged five and over; what plans there are for increasing provision in the next five years; and how these are to be funded.

Mrs. Currie: The Department's central office at Newcastle operates a scheme of finding day-care parents for employees' children. It also runs holiday play schemes for employees' children in the Easter and summer holidays. Child care provision is one of the areas being examined in a review of opportunities available to women employees in the Department.

Elderly People

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Monklands, West on 15 March, *Official Report*, column *552*, if he will provide information on what proportions of elderly people aged 75-plus years, and what proportions of those aged 85-plus years are *(a)* housebound, *(b)* bedfast, *(c)* unable to negotiate stairs independently, *(d)* unable to bath, shower or wash all over alone, and *(e)* unable to go to the toilet unaided.

Mrs. Currie: The most recent information available is from the 1985 general household survey. Among those aged 75 and over, and 85 and over, included in the sample inverviewed for the survey, it showed the proportion of people who:

	Aged 75 and over Percentage	*Aged 85 and over Percentage*
(a) Were not able to go out of doors	14·1	32·5
(b) Need help to get in and out of bed	3·2	6·3
Could not get in and out of bed at all	0·5	1·2
(c) Need help to negotiate stairs	6·0	11·6
Could not negotiate stairs at all	9·6	19·4
(d) Need help to bath, shower or wash all over	12·8	25·2
Could do none of these tasks	2·3	5·4
(e) Need help to get to the toilet	2·0	4·7
Could not get to the toilet at all	0·9	2·0

Income Support

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claimants at the Burnley local office of his Department will *(a)* have their benefit frozen at current level under the transitional arrangements for the introduction of income support and *(b)* have their benefits reduced as a result of the introduction of income support.

Mr. Portillo: I regret that this information is not available.

Nurse Teachers

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to his answer of Friday 18 March regarding the shortfall of nurse teachers, whether his Department has access to data and figures collected by the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting on the shortfall in nurse teachers.

Mr. Newton: Information published by the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting shows the number of nurse teachers in post at 31 March 1987. It does not show the number of vacancies or shortfalls in nurse teachers.

Senior Doctors

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list for each regional health authority the number of senior doctors per 100,000 in-patients treated for each year since 1979 to the latest available date.

Mr. Newton: The information requested is set out in the table.

Senior hospital doctors (whole-time equivalent) per 100,000 in-patient cases treated: England

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
England	222	220	222	227	220	218	215	217
Northern	217	214	220	236	223	220	220	220
Yorkshire	188	181	188	194	183	178	177	178
Trent	201	200	197	206	198	198	195	200
East Anglian	239	224	228	242	231	228	229	226
North West Thames	270	269	274	242	243	239	241	240
North East Thames	217	215	219	244	238	232	239	240
South East Thames	231	233	234	232	231	223	212	220
South West Thames	257	260	261	250	244	238	238	245
Wessex	216	213	208	216	211	214	214	208
Oxford	216	214	216	230	224	231	228	233
South Western	211	213	215	218	213	209	206	205
West Midlands	217	215	216	220	213	209	206	212
Mersey	210	214	211	216	207	205	203	202
North Western	198	203	204	212	206	206	200	203
SHAs	385	385	380	387	392	408	399	405

Notes:

(1) Includes permanent paid, honorary and locum staff in the grades of consultant, associate specialist and hospital practitioner within the medical specialties.

(2) All figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number of the whole time equivalent.

(3) Because of the NHS restructuring in 1982 figures on in-patients cases treated for the four Thames regions and Special Health Authorities are not strictly comparable over the whole period.

Quality-adjusted Life Years System

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the Government have taken up the quality-adjusted life years system in regard to hospital treatment of patients; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The QALY (quality adjusted life year) is a qualitative measure of health which is being developed experimentally in various centres, mainly for evaluating new medical techniques. No consensus has yet emerged on its general use in making decisions about the treatment of patients. Any use made by the Department of QALYs would have been only as one among a variety of factors to be taken into account.

Medical Laboratory Scientific Officers

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what progress is being made with the review of the pay and grading of medical laboratory scientific officers; and when it will report.

Mr. Newton: I understand that at a meeting on 19 April the management side of the professional and technical staffs B Whitley council put proposals for a new grade structure for medical laboratory scientific officers to the staff side. Further meetings have been arranged.

Performance-related Pay

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the answer of 15 April, *Official Report*, column *264*, if he will make it his policy in future to publish the reasons for each award of a performance related payment, whilst preserving the anonymity of individual recipients; if he will give this information in respect of 1987-88; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: All managers eligible for performance-related pay are subject to an annual performance review. The Department's circular PM(86)11 defines five levels of performance for this purpose and specifies the percentage additions that may be paid to managers rated in each of the higher bands. The detailed reasons for particular awards will reflect the different objectives set for individual managers and we have no plans to publish them.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the district health authorities whose information-gathering ability has been responsible for the delay in his publishing the hospital waiting list figures for September 1987.

Mr. Newton: The following district health authorities were unable to supply a complete set of September 1987 waiting list figures:

Cambridge
Norwich
Huntingdon
Paddington and North Kensington
North Derbyshire
South Derbyshire
Leicestershire
North Lincolnshire
South Lincolnshire
Bassetlaw
Central Nottinghamshire
Nottingham
Barnsley
Doncaster
Rotherham
Sheffield
Swindon
Oxfordshire
Solihull
Preston
Oldham
Hartlepool
Riverside
Enfield
Brighton
Dartford and Gravesham
Maidstone
Tunbridge Wells
Camberwell
West Surrey and North East Hampshire
South West Surrey
Mid Surrey
Chichester
Mid Downs
Kingston and Esher
Merton and Sutton
Portsmouth
Winchester
Bath
Hereford
Kidderminster
Worcester
North Staffordshire
South Warwickshire
East Birmingham
West Birmingham
Sandwell
Wandsworth

In addition the September 1987 waiting list data supplied by the following district health authorities had large inconsistencies:

Darlington
South West Durham
South Tyneside
Sunderland
East Yorkshire
Leeds Eastern
North Hertfordshire
Haringey
Redbridge
Worthing
East Dorset
West Dorset
West Berkshire
Aylesbury Vale
North Devon
Bromsgrove and Redditch
Rugby
Central Birmingham
East Birmingham
South Birmingham
Coventry
Blackpool Wyre and Fylde
Bolton
Chorley and South Ribble
Bury
North Manchester
Central Manchester
South Manchester
Salford
Tameside and Glossop
Wigan

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he will be releasing the hospital waiting list figures for September 1987.

Mr. Newton: I hope to do so shortly.

British Oxygen Company

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Clydesdale of 17 March, *Official Report*, column *679*, there is a specific record of transactions with the British Oxygen Company held by each of the area boards of the National Health Service.

Mrs. Currie: Individual NHS authorities are expected to, and do, maintain records of their transactions with contractors, including British Oxygen Company. No central record of all such transactions is maintained.

Social Workers (Law Teaching)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he is satisfied with the standard of the teaching of law on courses leading to the certificate of qualification in social work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I am aware of the concern about the standard of teaching of the law content of qualifying training courses for social workers as evidenced in the research report issued this month by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work.

The Government made available an additional £250,000 to CCETSW last autumn to assist it in achieving improvements in the quality of social work training. As part of the programme of improvements CCETSW has promoted research into the subject and organised a national workshop for all qualifying courses in social work to launch the report and to indicate the improvement required in the teaching and assessment of law.

Registered Homes Act

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he will take to extend the provisions of the Registered Homes Act to private establishments with less than four residents; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: We are considering the proposals in Sir Roy Griffiths' report, "Community Care: Agenda for Action" and Lady Wagner's report, "Residential Care—A Positive Choice" (copies of both of which are in the Library) that residential care homes with fewer than four residents should be subject to registration, and shall make our conclusions known in due course.

Wagner Report

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to be in a position to make a statement on what action the Government propose to take in the light of Lady Wagner's report on residential care, a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mr. Newton: I am unable to add anything to the reply given by my right hon. Friend to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), and the hon. Members for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) on 8 March 1988 at column *171*.

Family Credit

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will set out in the *Official Report* what steps claimants for family credit, who were in receipt of family income supplement, are expected to take to satisfy his Department that they do not have more than £6,000 in savings, apart from providing details of accounts held by banks, building societies or other financial bodies.

Mr. Portillo: Family income supplement recipients who declared that they had capital worth more than £2,000 were asked to provide evidence by sending in bank statements or account books, and so on. Those who had any property or land (other than the house they lived in) were asked to submit recent evidence of the value if available, and if not to provide the necessary details of the Department to ask the district valuer for a valuation.

District Health Authorities

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his policy on a district health authority in one region taking over responsibility for part of the geographical area of a district health authority in a different region.

Mrs. Currie: District health authority boundaries were established in 1982 after the most careful consultation locally and consideration of all the circumstances bearing on the effective delivery of services to patients. We would apply the same strict criteria to any proposal for changing those boundaries. I understand that a number of health authorities already manage some services on behalf of and within another authority's boundaries. That is a matter for agreement locally.

Debt Counselling

Mr. McTaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if his staff have been given training in debt counselling; and what guidance has been given to staff when arranging loans under the social fund as to the consideration to be given to other debts which claimants may have.

Mr. Portillo: Social fund officers receive training which includes money advice. In addition guidance on money advice is contained in part 9 of the social fund manual, which has been published. Guidance on the consideration to be given to other debts is contained in parts 3, 4 and 5 of the social fund manual.

Family Support

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the trends in spending since 1986 on *(a)* targeted and *(b)* untargeted financial support for families with children; and how they are expected to develop from April.

60. **Mr. Wood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how much *(a)* was spent in 1986-87, *(b)* will be spent in 1987-88, and *(c)* is expected to be spent in 1988-89 on providing financial assistance to families with children.

Mr. Scott *[holding anwer 8 March 1988]:* It is estimated that in 1986-87 around £5 billion was spent on families with children through income-related benefits (covering the needs of the parents as well as of the children themselves) and around £5 billion in non-income-related benefits (principally child benefit). Comparable figures for later years are not available.

"Family Fortunes"

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will place in the Library a copy of the work by the Central Statistical Office which contains reservations concerning the findings of the "Family Fortunes" report produced by the Family Policy Study Centre.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 31 March 1988]:* The Central Statistical Office is not the responsibility of this Department, but I understand that the director will be shortly placing in the Library the information requested.

Severe Disablement Allowance

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many people were in receipt of severe disablement allowance at the latest date for which figures are available; what was the breakdown of this total by *(a)* age and *(b)* cause of incapacity for work;

(2) how many people are receiving severe disablement allowance as a result of *(a)* mental handicap *(b)* severe mental handicap.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* Separate information is not available on the numbers who are receiving severe disablement allowance as a result of mental handicap or severe mental handicap. These cases are included in Table 2 under 'mental disorders'.

The information as at 5 April 1986 is as follows:

Table 1
Severe Disablement Allowance Claimants Incapacitated on 5 April 1986 Analysed by Age at 31 March 1986

Age	*Men*	*Women*
All ages	103,000	158,000
Under 20	12,000	8,000
20-24	18,000	10,000
25-29	11,000	10,000
30-34	9,000	11,000
35-39	9,000	14,000
40-44	8,000	14,000
45-49	6,000	17,000
50-54	7,000	23,000
55-59	7,000	28,000
60-64	10,000	16,000
65 and over	6,000	6,000

Note: The figures are quoted to the nearest 1,000.

Severe disablement allowance claimants incapacitated on 5 April 1986 Analysed by cause according to the International classification of diseases 1975

	Men	*Women*
All causes	103,000	158,000
Infectious and parasitic diseases	1,000	3,000
Neoplasms	—	2,000
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases, immunity disorders	1,000	3,000
Diseases of blood and blood forming organs	—	1,000
Mental disorders	62,000	60,000
Diseases of the nervous system and sense organs	16,000	30,000
Diseases of the circulartoy system	3,000	11,000
Diseases of the respiratory system	2,000	5,000
Diseases of the digestive system	1,000	1,000
Diseases of the genito-urinary system	—	1,000
Diseases of the skin and subcutaneous tissue	—	—
Diseases of the musculoskeletal system and connective tissue	3,000	27,000
Congenital anomalies	10,000	10,000
Symptoms signs and ill-defined conditions	3,000	4,000
Injury and poisoning	1,000	2,000

Notes:
1. The figures are quoted to the nearest 1,000
2. A dash indicates that there are fewer than 500 claimants suffering from that condition.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Private Nursing Homes

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if residents in private nursing homes are entitled to a weekly personal allowance from pension-Department of Health and Social Security payments.

Mr. Needham: Residents in private nursing homes who are eligible to receive retirement pension are paid the full weekly rate of pension to which they are entitled.

Maghaberry Prison

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many strip searches were made of female prisoners in Her Majesty's prison, Maghaberry, in February and March, giving the number of persons involved and number of times each person was searched and if any prison contraband, smuggled item, or illegal correspondence was discovered in any search, indicating which items; in how many cases prisoners refused to be searched and had to be restrained while the search was being conducted; and what were the reasons for the search under each of the following headings: *(a)* making a remand appearance at court, *(b)* attending trial, *(c)* inter-prison visit, and *(d)* other reasons.

Mr. Stanley: The information requested is as follows:

	February	*March*
Number of searches		
Total number of searches carried out	34	33
Total number of inmates searched	24	25
Number of prisoners searched once	17	17
Number of prisoners searched twice	6	8
Number of prisoners searched three times or more	1	—
Reasons for search		
First admission on remand-awaiting trial	10	4
First admission on sentence-final discharge	17	21
Attending remand court	—	—
Attending trial	—	—
Inter-prison visits	1	1
Pre-release home leave scheme	2	7
Visits to outside hospital	1	—
After a visit	3	—

No prohibited article was found during these searches and no prisoners refused to be searched.

Air Pollution

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has on the dangers that can be caused by the discharge of an excessive level of sulphur dioxide into the atmosphere over Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 20 April 1988]:* Monitoring of the levels of sulphur dioxide at various sites in Northern Ireland over many years has shown that these are within the international health criteria published by the World Health Organisation and the European Community.

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has on the dangers that can be caused by the discharge of an excessive level of heavy metals into the atmosphere over Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 20 April 1988]:* A survey carried out in the late 1970s by the Warren Spring laboratory of the Department of Trade and Industry showed that the levels of heavy metals sampled in the atmosphere in Northern Ireland were within the relevant criteria published for the protection of health. The nature of the Northern Ireland Industrial base means that levels of heavy metals discharged into the atmosphere are not a cause for concern.

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment is made by his Department of the level of heavy metals discharged into the atmosphere over Northern Ireland annually from the burning of fossil fuels by electricity generating stations in England and Wales; what are the levels for the remaining discharge of heavy metals; and what is treated as a safe level.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 20 April 1988]:* None. Monitoring of the effects of such discharges from the specific sources mentioned is neither practical nor necessary in view of the pattern of prevailing winds. As indicated in my reply to an earlier question from the hon. Member, the levels of certain heavy metals in the atmosphere in Northern Ireland are not a cause for concern.

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measurements are made by his Department to assess the emissions of sulphur dioxide into the atmosphere in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 20 April 1988]:* Continuous monitoring to assess the levels of sulphur dioxide and particulates in the atmosphere in Northern Ireland is undertaken by district councils and Northern Ireland Electricity. The results are published annually by the Warren Spring laboratory of the Department of Trade and Industry.

Public Appointments

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will now, pursuant to his answers to the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) of 9 March, *Official Report*, column *230*, and the hon. Member for Londonderry, East on 22 March, publish a table in the *Official Report* to show how many of the 39 persons suggested by the Government of the Irish Republic for public appointments in Northern Ireland were first suggested in *(a)* 1985, *(b)* 1986, *(c)* 1987 and *(d)* 1988; and, in each of these years, how many were appointed to (i) the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, (ii) the Fair Employment Agency, (iii) the Equal Opportunities Commission, (iv) the Police Authority for Northern Ireland, (v) the Police Complaints Board and (vi) other bodies;

(2) if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East on 22 March, he will indicate how many of the persons suggested through the Anglo-Irish Secretariat are United Kingdom citizens; and how many of the persons suggested were born in the Irish Republic.

Mr. Tom King *[holding answer 29 March 1988]:* No names were proposed this way in 1985; 34 were proposed in 1986, four in 1987 and two so far this year. Records of persons willing to serve on public bodies do not routinely include details of their citizenship or places of birth and information on these matters could be collected only at disproportionate cost. As I said in a reply to the hon. Gentleman on 22 March at column *81*, all those proposed are resident in Northern Ireland.

As I also said in that reply, it is not my practice to publish details of individuals so appointed.

DEFENCE

Exercise JMC 88-2

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what activity will take place at Stornoway airport during Exercise JMC 88-2.

Mr. Ian Stewart: None is planned.

Northern Ireland Frontier Army Battalion

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what effect the creation of a new Northern Ireland Frontier Army Battalion will have on *(a)* part-time Ulster Defence Regiment members in the area concerned and *(b)* full-time Ulster Defence Regiment personnel deployable along the frontier.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The planned formation of the additional brigade headquarters in Northern Ireland will not entail any changes to the present strengths of the part-time or permanent cadre UDR. However, there will be a number of changes in the deployment of both Regular Army and UDR units. It is not the policy to disclose such operational deployments.

Sea-launched Cruise Missiles

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Ministers about the possible deployment of further sea-launched cruise missiles.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) on 23 February, at column *165*.

US Air Force Northern Europe Tracking Station

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list each of the locations in the United Kingdom that are in use, or are planned to be in use for the United States air force northern Europe tracking station project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: RAE Oakhanger is the only United Kingdom site currently planned to be used for this purpose.

Ali Baba Oil Platform (Army Helicopter)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of the exercise in October 1987 involving Army helicopters operating from the oil platform Ali Baba in the Cromarty Firth.

Mr. Ian Stewart: In October 1987 Army helicopters from the TA Army Air Corps squadron practised deck landings on the Ali Baba oil platform as part of their annual training camp. The aim of the exercise was to test navigation and flying skills under realistic conditions.

Low Frequency Transmitter (Glen Garry)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to place notice of proposed development with the Highland regional council relating to the establishment of a trial extremely low frequency transmitter in Glen Garry.

Mr. Sainsbury: On present planning it is unlikely that a notice of proposed development will be submitted to the regional council before the autumn of this year.

Aircrew (Medical Checks)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes have been made to procedures for medical checks on Royal Air Force aircrew following the findings of the inquest into the death of Flight Lieutenant Ian Hill on 24 June 1987.

Mr. Freeman: Blood tests undertaken at periodic medical examinations have been revised to include cholesterol, triglyceride and thyroid stimulating hormone; on initial selection, at age 35, and five yearly thereafter. In addition, specific policy instructions for the interpretation of PME blood tests have been produced, and are about to be issued to all RAF medical officers, identifying levels at which further investigation is required.

Army Equipment Exhibition

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy that no representatives of Government with United Nations records of human rights abuse are invited to the British Army equipment exhibition; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: Invitations to the British Army equipment exhibition are considered on a case-by-case basis with all relevant factors taken into account. An invitation does not, of course, imply that we are prepared to authorise the sale of any particular item of equipment on display.

Ammunition (Storage)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy that no ammunition or explosives should be stored in, or close to, populated areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 10 April 1988]:* It is our general policy to locate ammunition and explosives depots in areas of low population, but this is not possible in all cases, not least because of the encroachment of buildings towards the defence estate. However, the storage of ammunition and explosives is kept under constant review and stringent rules are enforced to ensure maximum safety.

ENVIRONMENT

Enterprise Zones

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the figures indicating how his Department assesses the cost of *(a)* retaining each job and *(b)* creating each new job in enterprise zones; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: My answer to the hon. Member on 2 March described the method of assessing the cost of each net additional job in enterprise zones in Great Britain. The estimated cost at the end of 1986 of £8,500 for each net additional job was derived from the total costs to the Exchequer of £297 million and a total number of net additional jobs of 35,060.

The net additional jobs due to the enterprise zones include both jobs new to the zones and those jobs in firms that were present at designation and retained as a result of the zones, but separate estimates have not been made for each category.

Housing (Haringey)

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the house building figures in the Haringey borough council area in *(a)* the public sector and *(b)* the private sector, on the latest available date, and for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Roe: The reported house building figures up to 1986 appear in the following issues of "Local Housing Statistics" which are available in the Library:

	Issue No.	*Table No.*
1979	59	4*(b)*
	53	7[1]
1980-83	73	1*(b)* to *(e)* 3*(b)*, *(c)*[1]
1984	77	1*(b)*
1985	81	1*(b)*
1986	82	1*(b)*

[1] House building in Haringey by GLC and housing associations assisted by GLC, recorded separately.

Haringey has not yet made returns for October to December 1987, but the figures for January to September are:—

	Starts	*Completions*
Local authority	52	0
Housing associations	46	180
Public sector	98	180
Private sector	128	137
All	226	317

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the number of registered homeless people in the Haringey borough council area on the latest available date; and what are the corresponding figures for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Roe: The numbers of households for whom Haringey reported accepting responsibility to secure accommodation under the homelessness provisions of Housing Acts, in each year from 1981 to 1986, appear in a table which was placed in the Library in May 1987.

Corresponding information for 1979, 1980 and the first half of 1987 appears in "Local Housing Statistics" which is also available in the Library:

	Issue number	*Table number*
1979 first and second halves	54	14
1980 first half	59	9
second half	62	13
1987 first quarter	82	9a
second quarter	83	9

Haringey has not yet reported the figures for the second half of 1987 to the Department.

A new reporting system was introduced for London boroughs in the third quarter of 1982, so that figures are not directly comparable over the whole period.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the number of people on council house waiting lists in the Haringey borough council area on the latest available date; and what are the corresponding figures for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Roe: The number of households on waiting lists at April, and the changes in the previous 12 months, appear in columns B51 and B53, respectively, of the 1986 and 1987 housing investment programme "All items prints" which are available in the Library. Information for earlier years is not available centrally.

Child Care

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what child care provision his Department provides for pre-school age children of the Department's employees; what child care provision for school holiday and/or after school care is provided for employees' children aged five and over; what plans there are for increasing provision in the next five years; and how these are to be funded.

Mr. Ridley: An experimental child care scheme was held at the Cardington residential training centre for two weeks in August 1987. The Department is considering what scope there is for further provision without continuing subsidy.

Rating Reform

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received seeking clarification of the treatment of riparian rights under the community charge provisions; what response he has made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: Some representations have been received about the rating of riparian rights. We have no proposals to change the existing provisions relating to the liability and assessment of rates in respect of riparian or other sporting rights; they will remain subject to rates and will be charged at the national non-domestic rate poundage.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to his reply of 28 March to the hon. Member for Copeland, *Official Report*, column *312*, when he expects the estimates to which he refers to be made available.

Mr. Ridley: As soon as I have local authorities budget returns. So far, 335 of 426 have been received. 80 of these appear to contain errors which are being followed up.

London Residuary Body

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many staff are currently employed by the London residuary body.

Mr. Chope: The London residuary body employed 1,993 staff at 1 April 1988. This figure is in full-time equivalents.

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the London residuary body to be wound up.

Mr. Chope: The future of the London residuary body is dependent on Parliament's consideration of the Education Reform Bill. It expects to have completed its substantive work in winding up the affairs of the former Greater London council by March 1990.

Rubenstein v. Secretary of State for the Environment

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Lancashire, West of 30 March, *Official Report*, column *474*, if he proposes to appeal against the judgment in the case of Rubenstein *v.* Secretary of State for the Environment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: We do not propose to appeal against this judgment, and are considering what line of future action we might take.

Deforestation

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take urgent steps to assist in the holding of an international conference on deforestation and the destruction of the ozone layer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: The Department does not consider an international conference to be the most immediately effective way to evaluate recent theories that tropical forest burning may influence the ozone layer. The Montreal protocol on substances which deplete the ozone layer requires that scientific evidence be reassessed before the first review of measures in 1990 and the Department will ensure that the effect of tropical forest burning will be included in that assessment. In addition, I have asked the Department's expert advisory body, the stratospheric ozone review group, to comment on the hypothesis in their next report to the Department, expected this autumn.

Dersingham Bypass

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the text of the letter he has sent to Norfolk county council concerning the route of the Dersingham bypass and its environmental consequences.

Mr. Moynihan: The Department wrote to the chief executive, Norfolk county council on 10 March. The letter referred to a deemed planning permission granted by the county council to itself in February 1987 for the A149 Dersingham-Ingoldisthorpe-Snettisham bypass. The letter stated:

"The Secretary of State considers that it might be expedient, in the wider public interest, for an order to be made under Section 45 of the 1971 Act, revoking the deemed planning permission, in view of the importance of the Dersingham Bog Site of Special Scientific Interest in a national and international context, and the need to ensure that conservation issues are fully and publicly examined.

The Secretary of State accordingly hereby consults the local planning authority, in compliance with section 276(1) of the 1971 Act, as to whether it is expedient that an order should be made. The Department also wishes to know whether, if the Council consider that an order should be made, they would be prepared to make the order themselves."

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will institute a public inquiry into the potential effect to the Dersingham bog site of special scientific interest if the route of the proposed Dersingham bypass as approved by Norfolk county council is followed.

Mr. Moynihan: The Department awaits the county council's response to the consultation letter of 10 March. If the county council objects, the Secretary of State will consider whether he ought to make a revocation order himself. Should he decide to do so, an inquiry would be held into objections to the proposed order including those of the county council. Any inquiry would probably be separate from, but concurrent with, the inquiry into objections to the council's related compulsory purchase and side roads orders.

London City Airport

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what part of the planning permission he gave to the operators of London City airport permits experimental flights of jet aircraft to or from that airport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The planning permission for London City airport, formerly known as STOLport, does not preclude flights of jet fixed-wing aircraft provided that they are in accordance with the conditions attached to my right hon. Friend's decision of 23 May 1985. Enforcement of these conditions is a matter for the London Docklands development corporation as the development control authority for the area in which the airport lies.

Rents

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the average level *(a)* of local authority rents and *(b)* of fair rents registered for unfurnished lettings in England in each of the years from 1979 to 1988, indicating the percentage increase in each on an annual and cumulative basis, showing also the movement of the retail prices index over that same period.

Mr. Ridley: The figures on local authority rents, the average rents registered by rent officers and the movements in the retail prices index up to 1987 are as follows. Corresponding figures are not available for 1988.

Year	*Average weekly rents*[1] *England* *LA (unrebated) April* £	*per cent. increase over year*	*since 1979*	*Fair rents Unfurnished tenancies*[2] *2nd half year* £	*Retail Prices Index United Kingdom April* *per cent increase over year*	*since 1979*
1979	6·41	—	—	[3]9·55	—	—
1980	7·70	20	20	[3]11·40	22	22
1981	11·42	48	78	13·00	12	36
1982	13·48	18	110	14·25	9	49
1983	13·97	4	118	15·60	4	55

Year	Average weekly rents[1] England LA (unrebated) April £	per cent. increase over year	since 1979	Fair rents Unfurnished tenancies[2] 2nd half year £	Retail Prices Index United Kingdom April per cent increase over year	since 1979
1984	14·66	5	129	16·80	5	63
1985	15·54	6	142	18·05	7	75
1986	16·36	5	155	19·95	3	80
1987	17·20	5	168	21·19	4	87

[1] service charges, if any, are included in fair rents, but not in local authority rents.
[2] registered rents for private regulated tenancies only.
[3] England and Wales.

The mix of properties for which rents are registered varies from year to year for a number of reasons, for example, extension of decontrol in 1981 and the reduction from three to two years in the minimum period for re-registration which led to re-registrations in 1983 of rents previously registered in 1980 and 1981. Therefore, comparisons of average for consecutive years do not properly reflect rent movements. Better estimates of rent movements are derived from previous and new registered rents for tenancies where there has been no material change in terms or in the physical condition. For properties with rents fixed in the second halves of 1979, 1982, 1984 and 1986, the estimated increases are:

	per cent. increase in period	annualised per cent. increase
1979-82	47	14
1982-84	18	9
1984-86	17	8

The estimated annualised increase for properties with rents fixed in the second half of 1987 was 9 per cent.

Housing Investment Programme

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total of all the housing investment programme bids for 1988-89 submitted by English housing authorities; and what were the comparable figures for each year since 1978-79.

Mr. Ridley: In their housing investment programme submissions, local authorities set out their proposals for their total capital expenditure programme in the relevant year. The figures are, therefore, intended to cover not only expenditure financed from allocations, but the very considerable amount of expenditure financed from other sources. The totals of proposed programmes for the years 1978-79 to 1988-89 have been as follows:

Proposed Programmes[1]

	£ millions 1988-89 prices
1978-79	8,493
1979-80	7,091
1980-81	7,078
1981-82	5,203
1982-83	4,562
1983-84	4,462
1984-85	5,381
1985-86	5,516
1986-87	5,943
1987-88	6,011
1988-89	6,167

[1] Excludes non-prescribed expenditure.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the housing investment programme allocations made to each London borough, metropolitan district and non-metropolitan district in each of the years from 1978-79 to 1988-89, expressed in constant 1988-89 prices.

Mr. Ridley: A table listing the housing investment programme allocations made for all housing authorities in England for each of the years from 1978-79 to 1988-89 at 1988-89 constant prices will be placed in the Library as soon as possible.

Since 1981-82 local authorities have been able to supplement their allocations by expenditure financed from capital receipts. Nationally over half of local authorities' capital expenditure in 1988-89 is expected to be financed from capital receipts.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, following the announcement of the timetable for district and county councils to implement competitive tendering procedures, he will make a statement as to when the other bodies covered by part I of the Local Government Act have to implement competition for their services.

Mr. Chope: In the light of consultation, my right hon. Friend has now considered how competition can be implemented most effectively for these remaining authorities. His decisions reflect their level of activity in the services involved, the application of the £100,000 de minimis threshold and the fact that parish and community councils have had less time than other councils to prepare for competition. He has decided that where they are not exempt under the de minimis threshold, the authorities and bodies listed in the table will be required to expose all their defined activities except ground maintenance to competition by 1 August 1989, and ground maintenance by 1 January 1990:

Metropolitan county fire and civil defence authorities
London Fire and Civil Defence Authorities
Metropolitan county passenger transport authorities
Waste disposal authorities set up by or under the Local Government Act 1985
Joint police authorities
Any joint committee of local authorities
Urban development corporations
The Council of the Isles of Scilly

The Inner London Education Authority is excluded from the list in view of its short remaining life, assuming that the relevant provisions in the Education Reform Bill are enacted. A separate announcement will be made in relation of new town bodies.

Representatives of parish and community councils are being consulted on the proposition that competition should apply to them from 1 January 1990 for ground maintenance and 1 August 1990 for all other activities. Responses have been requested by 31 May.

System-built Houses

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what his Department assesses to be the latest amount needed on each Wimpey no-fines house, in the Blakenhall area of Walsall in order to bring such properties up to acceptable standards.

Mrs. Roe *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* This is a matter for the local authority, rather than the Department.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the west midlands section of his Department will be willing to see a deputation of residents from the Wimpey no-fines properties in Walsall in order to discuss the present state of disrepair to these houses.

Mrs. Roe *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* The regional controller and other officials have already visited these houses. I do not feel that a further meeting would be useful. It is for Walsall metropolitan borough council to determine its own priorities for the repair and improvement of its own housing stock.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what latest information and consultations have taken place between his Department and the Walsall metropolitan borough council regarding the work needed to bring up to acceptable standards the Wimpey no-fines properties in the Blakenhall area of the borough.

Mrs. Roe *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* Officials of the Department discussed this with Walsall metropolitan borough council at the housing investment programme meeting on 16 September 1987. The council also submitted a written bid to the Department in January 1988 for estate action support in 1988-89 for the Blakenhall area, but this was not accepted, for the reasons given in my reply of 18 April to the hon. Member at column *307*.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment his Department has made of the dangers to residents of the present state of disrepair in the Wimpey no-fines properties in the Blakenhall area of Walsall.

Mrs. Roe *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* Responsibility for the health and safety of tenants lies with the local authority, both as landlord and through their other statutory powers and responsibilities.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Chelford Market

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received about the case for additional grading facilities at Chelford market; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will reconsider his refusal to grant additional grading facilities at Chelford market; what representations he has received on this subject; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I have received a number of representations. Grading facilities are provided to allow producers to obtain benefit of the variable premium schemes consistent with the need for efficiency and economy. There are numerous liveweight and deadweight certification facilities in the area and there are no grounds for providing additional facilities at Chelford.

Set-aside and Extensification

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give *(a)* his Department's and *(b)* the European Community's definition for (i) set-aside and (ii) extensification.

Mr. Gummer: Definitions applying to all member states including the United Kingdom are contained in a regulation on this subject now awaiting formal adoption by the Council. The regulation defines set-aside as withdrawal from agricultural production of at least 20 per cent. of land devoted to supported arable crops in the reference period for at least five years, with provision for the farmer to opt out after three years. Extensification is defined as reduction of at least 20 per cent. for a period of at least five years in a farmer's output of a surplus agricultural product, without any increase in production capacity for other surplus products.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether a ceiling for the annual or total cost to the European agricultural guarantee and guidance fund of the set-aside scheme was agreed at the European Community's Council meeting of 11 to 13 February.

Mr. Gummer: The European Council agreed that a ceiling of 600 million ECUs should apply in 1992 to expenditure on set-aside and income aids taken together.

Peanuts

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what quantity of peanuts containing aflatoxin levels above one part per billion were imported into Britain in 1987; and if he will list and quantify the uses to which they were put.

Mr. Donald Thompson: This information is not available.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what criteria his Department uses in assessing the appropriate levels of aflatoxin permitted in peanuts for *(a)* human and *(b)* animal consumption.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The proposed statutory limit of 0·01 mg/kg for aflatoxin in peanuts for human consumption recommended by the independent Food Advisory Committee reflects the policy of reducing aflatoxin contamination to the lowest level that is technologically achievable by good manufacturing practice.

So far as consumption by animals is concerned, maximum limits are set in EC Directives the aims of which include the protection of human and animal health. The levels in feedingstuffs aim to ensure no transference of aflatoxin into milk supplies.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give details of the sampling methods used by his Department in assessing the levels of aflatoxin contained in peanuts imported into Britain.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The sampling plan used by port health authorities to monitor the levels of aflatoxins in peanuts intended for human consumption was designed by the Tropical Products Institute and is published in the Ministry's food surveillance paper No. 18 on mycotoxins, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Slaughterhouse Charges

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the purpose of the EEC directive on the harmonising of slaughterhouse charges in the EEC; what will be the consequence of the proposals for British slaughterhouse charges; whether Her Majesty's Government treat this proposal as falling to be considered under the Single European Act by majority vote; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The purpose of the proposals for harmonising hygiene and inspection charges in slaughterhouses is to remove distortions to competition. As put to the Council of Agriculture Ministers meeting on 19 April the proposals were unacceptable to the United Kingdom and I succeeded in persuading the Council that the proposals needed further consideration. The proposals do fall to be determined by qualified majority, but that has nothing to do with changes arising from the Single European Act.

Food Aid

Mr. Moss: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has yet decided on the arrangements to implement the European Community scheme for distribution of surplus food to the most needy.

Mr. Gummer: On 12 January, my right hon. Friend announced the form of the United Kingdom's participation in the European Community surplus food scheme. The deadline for applications from organisations wishing to participate was 29 February, and the Commission confirmed on 12 April its allocation of £10·4 million (15 million ECUs) to the United Kingdom for 1988. Applications for butter and beef were received from a wide range of organisations, especially from charities. The Government have carefully considered these applications and have designated 127 organisations which are capable of meeting the conditions of the scheme. I am placing a list of designated organisations in the Library.

Individual designated organisations are being informed of the amounts of butter and beef they may withdraw free of charge from intervention stores. Since requests for produce from those organisations have exceeded the Commission's allocation to us by about three times, we have to impose some restrictions. To ensure that the produce is shared as fairly as possible between designated organisations, we have reduced the allocations for those who have requested the highest amount per recipient, and we will take up in the United Kingdom all the butter and beef allowed under the scheme.

Charities and local authorities will make their own arrangements in response to local need and the capacity of their own organisations. Method and timing of distributions will therefore differ throughout the country, and these may take place at any time during the next eight months. Notification will therefore be arranged locally by the organisation concerned.

Plant Variety and Seed Certification Systems

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the report of the "Review of Plant Variety and Seed Certification Systems"; if he will make it his policy to hold consultations with all interested parties before implementing any of the recommendations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 14 April to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) at columns *241-42.*

Free Food Scheme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the amount of food which, to date, has been issued to the needy under the free food scheme for each country and each product; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer *[pursuant to his reply, 30 March 1988, c. 563.]:* The Council has determined a budgetary allocation of 100 million ECUs for the free food scheme for 1988, within which total the Commission has allocated funds to each member state, and has authorised release as follows:

Member state	*Financial limit (MECUs)*	*Maximum quantities which may be drawn from intervention stores subject for each member state to the overriding financial limit stated*
Belgium	1·28	225 tonnes of soft wheat 160 tonnes of butter 148 tonnes of beef
Denmark	0·10	5 tonnes of butter 20 tonnes of beef
Germany	7·30	2,331 tonnes of butter
Greece	1·90	700 tonnes of beef
Spain	20·10	2,200 tonnes of durum wheat 1,000 tonnes of butter 4,600 tonnes of beef 1,340 tonnes of olive oil
France	16·35	2,050 tonnes of soft wheat 4,850 tonnes of durum wheat 1,300 tonnes of butter

Member state	*Financial limit (MECUs)*	*Maximum quantities which may be drawn from intervention stores subject for each member state to the overriding financial limit stated*
		3,100 tonnes of beef
Ireland	2·35	24 tonnes of butter
		500 tonnes of beef
Italy	15·90	15,000 tonnes of durum wheat
		450 tonnes of butter
		3,300 tonnes of beef
		450 tonnes of olive oil
Luxembourg	0·10	30 tonnes of soft wheat
		20 tonnes of butter
		10 tonnes of beef
Netherlands	1·50	150 tonnes of butter
		300 tonnes of beef
Portugal	5·70	650 tonnes of soft wheat
		350 tonnes of durum wheat
		350 tonnes of butter
		1,550 tonnes of beef
United Kingdom	15·00	3,000 tonnes of butter
		2,000 tonnes of beef

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 22 April 1988

WALES

Gipsy Caravan Sites

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* the location of any official gipsy caravan sites within an area of outstanding natural beauty in Wales.

Mr. Grist: There are no official gipsy caravan sites within a designated area of outstanding natural beauty in Wales.

Trunk Roads

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he plans to publish an updated programme for trunk road improvements in Wales to replace the report "Roads in Wales 1985".

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I expect a new edition of "Roads in Wales" to be published later this year.

East Dyfed Health Authority

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which regions of Wales come under the jurisdiction of the East Dyfed health authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: East Dyfed health authority is responsible for the provision of health services in the districts of Carmarthen, Ceredigion, Dinefwr and Llanelli.

Travel

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will state the total costs incurred by his Department on foreign travel during the financial year 1987-88 identified by *(a)* ministerial travel and *(b)* travel abroad by civil servants.

Mr. Peter Walker: The overseas travel costs of Ministers and Officials could be separated only at unjustifiable cost. The total expenditure on overseas travel by Ministers and Officials of my Department in the financial year 1987-88 was £47,551·10.

Welsh Language

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those primary schools in Dyfed which *(a)* have classes where Welsh is the sole or main medium of instruction of first or second language pupils, *(b)* have classes of first or second language pupils where some of the teaching is through the medium of Welsh and *(c)* teach no Welsh, or where there are classes where Welsh is taught as a second language but not used as a teaching medium.

Mr. Wyn Roberts *[holding answer 15 April 1988]:* The information is as follows:

Dyfed schools with some classes where Welsh is the sole or main medium of instruction

Bwlchygroes C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Sirol Tegryn
Ysgol Gynradd Eglwyswrw
Fishguard C.P. School
Goodwick C.P. School
Prendergast C.P. School
Prendergast Infant & Nursery
Brynconin C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Sirol Blaenffos
Ysgol Gynradd Sirol Crymych
Ysgol Gynradd Hermon
Ysgol Llanychllwydog
Ysgol Gynradd Maenclochog
Narberth C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd St. Dogmaels
Golden Manor C.P. Infant
Grove Junior C.P. School
Fishguard Infant & Nursery School
Felinfach C.P. School
Pennant C.P. School
Yr Ysgol Gynradd Talgarreg
Ysgol Gymraeg Alexandra
Ysgol Brynherbert
Ysgol Gynradd Llangwyryfon
Ysgol Gynradd Penllwyn
Ysgol Gynradd Rhydypennau
Ysgol Gynradd Talybont
Aberforth C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Beulah
Cardigan Junior C.P. School
Cardigan Infants C.P. Aberteifi
Ysgol Gynradd Llechryd
Ysgol Y Blaenau
Ysgol Gynradd Cwrtnewydd
Ffynnon Bedr C.P. School
Llanwnnen C.P. School
Ysgol Adpar
Ysgol Gynradd Capel Cynon
Ysgol Gynradd Coedybryn
Ysgol Gynradd Glynarthen
Llandysul C.P. School
Ysglo Gynradd Penmorfa
Ysgol Gynradd Pontsian
Ysgol Gynradd Tregroes
Trewen C.P. School
Llangeitho C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Penuwch
Ysgol Gynradd Tregaron
Ysgol Gwenllian
Ysgol Gymraeg Dewi Sant
Pontyberem C.P. School
Llanddarog V.C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Cefneithin
Ysgol Gynradd Drefach
Llechyfedach C.P. School
Mynyddcerrig C.P. School
Cwmgwili C.P. School
Tumble C.P. School
Gorslas C.P. School
Bancffosfelen C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Gwynfryn
Ysgol Gynradd Ponthenri
Ammanford C.P. Junior School
Ammanford C.P. Infants School
Glanamman C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Cefnbrynbrain
Parcyrhun C.P. School
Ystradowen C.P. School
Ysgol Y Babanod Twyn Garnant
Cwrt Henry C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Trap
Ysgol Llansawel
Ysgol Gynradd Ffarmers
Caio County Primary School
Llangadóg County Primary
Bethlehem C.P. School
Llandovery C.P. School
Llanwrda C.P. School
Cŏedmor C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Rhydcymerau

Whitland County Primary
Ysgol Gynradd Brynsaron
New Inn C.P. School
Pencader C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Llanpumsaint
Ysgol Y Dderwen
Felinfoel C.P. School
Llangennech C.P. Infant School
Llangennech Junior School
Hendy C.P. Mixed School
Trimsaran Infants School
Ysgol Brynsierfel
Llanarthne C.P. School
Llangunmor C.P. School
Trimsaran Junior Mixed School
Parc Y Tywyn School
Ysgol Gymraeg Rhydaman
Ysgol Becca
Llandybie C.P. School
Hafodwenog C.P. School
Ysgol Teilo Sant
Llanybydder C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Cynwyl Elfed
Penygroes County Primary
Llandyfaelog V.C.P. School
Capel Cynfab Primary School
Llanfihangel-ar-Arth V.C.P.
Llanllwni V.C.P. School
Cilgerran V.C.P. School
Tenby Infants V.C. School
Trefilan V.C.P. School
Penboyr V.A. School
Llanwenog V.C.P. School

Dyfed schools with teaching through the medium of Welsh as a first or second language

Maesybont C.P. School
Cross Hands C.P. School
Llangain C.P. School
Idole Primary School
Ysgol Gynradd Peniel
Llangyndeyrn Primary School
Carway C.P. School
Pontyates C.P. School
St. Clears C.P. School
Bancyfelin C.P. School
Glasfryn County Primary
Llangynin C.P. School
Meidrim C.P. School
Saron C.P. School
Betws C.P. School
Brynamman C.P. Infant School
Blaenau C.P. School
Garnant Primary School
Nantygroes C.P. School
Llanedi C.P. School
Cwmifor C.P. School
Ffairfach C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Talyllychau
Ysgol Gynradd Brechfa
Crugybar County Primary
Ysgol Gynradd Llanycrwys
Gwynfe County Primary School
Llansadwrn C.P. School
Llanddeusant C.P. School
Henllan Amgoed C.P. School
Llanboidy C.P. School
Cwmbach C.P. School
Ysgol Capel Iwan
Gynradd Alltwalis School
Ysgol Gynradd Mynyddygarreg
Llansaint C.P. School
Ysgol Y Babanod Felinfoel
Five Roads C.P. School
Morfa Infants Nursery School
Ysgol Gynradd Llansteffan
Llannon C.P. School
Brynamman Junior Mixed School
Abernant C.P. School
Myrddin C.P. School
Ysgol Y Castell
Ysgol Gynradd Nantgaredig
Ysgol Gynradd Penffordd
Dinas C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Sirol Hayscastle
Ysgol Gynradd Glandwr
Gynradd Sirol Mynachlogdou
Ysgol Gynradd Moylegrove
Newport C.P. School
Ysgol Puncheston Casmael
St. Davids C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Sirol Casblaidd
Tenby Junior C.P. School
Solva C.P. School
Croesgoch C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Aberaeron
Caerwedros C.P. School
Cilcennin C.P. School
Ciliau Parc C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Cribyn
Cross Inn C.P. School
Dihewyd C.P. School
Gwenlli C.P.School
Ysgol Gynradd Llanarth
Ysgol Llanllwchaiarn
Ysgol Gynradd Llannon
Mydroilyn C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Llwyncelyn
Capel Seion Primary School
Comins Coch C.P. School
Cwmpadarn C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Llanafan
Ysgol Gynradd Llangynfelyn
Llanfarian C.P. School
Ysgol Llanfihangel-Y-Creuddyn
Ysgol Gynradd Llanilar
Mynach C.P. School
Penparcau C.P. Junior School
Ysgol Syr John Rhys
Ysgol Gynradd Trefeurig
Penparc C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Y Ferwig
Brongest C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Capel Dewi
Yr Ysgol Gynradd Pontgarreg
Rhydlewis C.P. School
Bronant C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Llanddewi
Ysgol Lledrod
Ysg Gynradd Pontrhydfendigaid
Ysgol Gynradd Swyddffynnon
Ysgol Ysbyty Ystwyth
Ysgol Gynradd Blaenporth
Borth C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Penrhyncoch
Aberbanc C.P. School
Ysgol Ydderi
Cenarth C.P. School
Abergwili V.C.P. School
Ferryside V.C.P. School
Newcastle Emlyn V.C.P. School
Llanddowror V.C.P. School
Llangynog Vaughans Charity
Manordeifi Upper V.C.P.
Manorowen V.C.P. School
Mathry V.C.P. School
Letterston V.C. School
Barham V.C. School
Ysgol Myfenydd
Llanfynydd V.A.P. School
Model V.A.P. School

Dyfed schools with no teaching through the medium of Welsh

Ysgol Gynradd Tycroes
Ysgol Gynradd Penwaun
Johnstown C.P. School
Pentrepoeth Junior School
Pentrepoeth Infant School
Llanmiloe C.P. School
Bryn C.P. School
Bynea C.P. School
Dafen C.P. School

Llwynhendy Junior School
Furnace C.P. School
Ysgol Yr Ynys
Burry Port C.P. Infant School
Copperworks Infant School
Llanelli Copperworks C.P.
Morfa C.P. Junior Mixed
Old Road C.P. Primary School
Lakefield County Primary
Swiss Valley C.P. School
Pembrey C.P. School
Llandeilo C.P. School
Halfway C.P. School
Pwll C.P. Mixed School
Penygaer C.P.
Sageston C.P. School
Dale C.P. School
Barn Street C.P. School
Fenton C.P. Infants School
Herbrandston C.P. School
Orielton C.P. School
Johnston C.P. School
Lamphey C.P. School
Hook C.P. School
Waterston C.P. School
Loveston C.P. School
Hakin C.P. Junior Mixed School
Hakin C.P. Infant School
North Road C.P. School
Neyland Junior C.P. School
Albion Square C.P. Infant School
Pennar Junior School
St. Ishmaels C.P. School
Pentlepoir C.P. School
Saundersfoot C.P. School
Stepaside C.P. School
Templeton C.P. School
Pennar C.P. Infant School
The Meads C.P. Infant and Nursery School
Tavernspite C.P. School
Mount Airey Nursery and Infant School
Monkton C.P. Infant School
Broad Haven C.P. School
Roch C.P. School

Park Infants C.P. School
The Mount C.P. Infants and Nurseries School
Neyland C.P. Infants and Nurseries School
Pembroke Dock C.P. Junior School
Ysgol Gynradd Cei Newydd
Ysgol Y Plant Bach
Plascrug Primary School
Priory Junior C.P. School
Ysgol Gynradd Y Bigyn
Stebonheath C.P. School
Burryport C.P. School
Tremoilet V.C. School
Laugharne V.C.P. School
Priory V.C.P. School
Myddfai V.C.P. School
Cilycwm V.C.P. School
Angle V.C.P. School
Burton V.C.P. School
Cosheston V.C.P. School
Jeffreyston (Creselly) V.C.P.
Llanddewi Velfry V.C.P.
Llangwm Voluntary School
Manorbier V.C.P. School
Penally V.C.P. School
Rosemarket V.C.P. School
Spittal V.C.P. School
Stackpole V.C.P. School
Haverfordwest Junior V.C. School
St. Florence V.C. School
Hubberston V.C. School
St. Marys R.C. J.I.N. School
St. Marys Primary School
St. David V.A.P. School
Holy Name V.R.C. School
St. Mary's V.R.C. School
Mary Immaculate V.R.C. School
St. Francis V.R.C. School
St. Aidans V.A.P. School
St. Padarns R.C.P.School
St. Teils V.R.C. School
St. Marks V.A.P. School
Pentip V.A. Primary School

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecutors (Manual of Guidance)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General if he will place in the Library a copy of the manual of guidance issued to Crown prosecutors in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement as to the criteria upon which a decision to prosecute is based, as set out in the manual.

The Attorney-General: The criteria upon which such a decision is based are set out in the code for Crown prosecutors issued by the Director of Public Prosecutions pursuant to section 10 of the Prosecutions of Offences Act 1985. Copies of that code are available to the public. My predecessor caused a copy to be placed in the Library on 25 June 1986, as he announced in his answer of the same date to the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth). Crown prosecutors are issued also with manuals of guidance. I am discussing with the Director of Public Prosecutions whether it would be proper to cause copies to be placed in the Library.

Foreign Travel

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Attorney-General if he will state the total costs incurred by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Lord Chancellor's Department on foreign travel during the financial year 1987-88 identified by (i) ministerial travel and (ii) travel abroad by civil servants.

The Solicitor-General: The total costs incurred by *(a)* the Law Officers' Department and *(b)* the Lord Chancellor's Department on foreign travel by Ministers and civil servants during the financial year 1987-88 were as follows:

	£
Law Officers' Department	
Ministerial travel	4,211
Travel by civil servants	2,550
Lord Chancellor's Department	
Ministerial travel	21,707·45
Travel by civil servants	13,507·93

Birmingham Pub Bombings

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General at whose initiative the inquiry by the City of London police, arising from the recent appeal hearing of the men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings, was established; when was it set up; and what is its remit.

The Solicitor-General: The Director of Public Prosecutions wrote to the commissioner for the City of London police on 30 March 1988 to ask for inquiries to be made, following information received from another police force. The inquiries are not yet concluded.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Angola

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list current development projects in Angola for which United Kingdom national, Commonwealth or European Community assistance is given; what is the value of that assistance; and if he will specify the means or agencies through which assistance is given.

Mr. Chris Patten: About half our bilateral programme to Angola is devoted to the provision of training in Britain. Within Angola we are currently supporting the following Government projects:

Estimated expenditure 1988-89

	£'000
English language teaching project	61
English teacher education and training programme	109

Development activities currently being financed by the European Community are as follows:

Current commitment

	£million
Sectoral import programme	24·48
Banco Nacional de Angola (BNA) global loan	2·80
Technical assistance for BNA and government officials	0·40
Feasibility studies	0·34
Regional training	0·09
TOTAL	28·11

The United Kingdom share of these EC-financed development activities is approximately £4·64 million.

There is no Commonwealth aid to Angola.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list United Kingdom contributions to Angola through national, Commonwealth and European Community action in each year since 1983.

Mr. Chris Patten: Gross bilateral aid and the estimated British share of European Community aid to Angola since 1983 have been as follows:

£'000

	1983	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Gross bilateral aid	71	146	164	317
Estimated UK share of EC aid	390	1,510	1,290	1,500

Figures for 1987 are not yet available.

There is no Commonwealth aid to Angola.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

National Curriculum

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the curriculum development of social, political and moral subjects in the national curriculum; and how it will be structured.

Mrs. Rumbold: Many of these themes will be covered by the attainment targets and programmes of study of the core and other foundation subjects; we can expect others to be included in the rest of what schools provide. Their place and development within the school curriculum as a whole, the purposes of which are set out in Clause 1 of the Bill, are matters on which the National Curriculum Council will be able to advise.

Capital Allocations (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has received a letter from the Nottinghamshire county council education chairman regarding the county capital allocation for education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has received a letter from the chief education officer of Nottinghamshire county council concerning the authority's capital expenditure allocation for 1988-89. A reply was sent on 12 April 1988.

Medical Research Council

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what provision for research into major psychiatric disorders is contained in the Medical Research Council's proposals to develop a new national centre for research and postgraduate medical education;

(2) what provision for research into diseases of the nervous system is contained in the Medical Research Council's proposals to develop a new national centre for research and postgraduate medical education;

(3) what will be the *(a)* capital and *(b)* the annual running costs of the Medical Research Council's proposed new national centre for research and postgraduate medical education;

(4) where the Medical Research Council's new national centre for research and postgraduate medical research will be located;

(5) what provision for research into neurological disease is contained in the Medical Research Council's proposals to develop a new national centre for research and postgraduate medical education;

(6) what provision for research into infectious disease and clinical genetics is contained in the Medical Research Council's proposals to develop a new national centre for research and postgraduate medical education.

Mr. Jackson: The Medical Research Council is in the process of developing proposals, following the Stoker report on the clinical research centre, for a new national centre for multispecialty postgraduate medical education and research based at Hammersmith. I understand that the MRC intends to submit detailed proposals on this to Government later this year.

Teachers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide details of the percentage of black teachers and white teachers by local education authority; what are their percentages in respect of salary scales; what is the percentage who have head or deputy headships; and if he will make a statement on the number of black teachers who are in teacher training.

Mrs. Rumbold: This information is not available. However, as announced by my right hon. Friend on 28

October 1987 at column 261, a draft circular on the collection of this information has been issued for consultation. Additionally, the Department issued a consultative document on 8 March on the collection of ethnically based statistics for students in further and higher education, including those in teacher training.

Foreign Travel

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will state the total costs incurred by his Department on foreign travel during the financial year 1987-88 identified by *(a)* ministerial travel and *(b)* travel abroad by civil servants.

Mrs. Rumbold: The exact costs incurred by this Department on foreign travel during the financial year 1987-88 are not yet known but are expected to total some £143,000, as follows:

	£
(a) Ministerial	32,000
(b) Civil Servants:	
Her Majesty's Inspectorate	39,000
Officials	72,000

Departmental Votes

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give details of any revised cash limits for his Department's Votes in respect of university funding in 1988-89.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit on class XII, vote 3 is being revised to take account of an increase of £3·1 million in respect of pay for clinical academic staff. This increase takes account of the related increase for the hospital and community health service in respect of the recommendations of the Doctors and Dentists Review Body. It is based on the premise that academic staff will be reimbursed in appropriate circumstances through the National Health Service for two thirds of their defence body subscriptions. The effect of the change is as follows:

Class	*Vote*	*Description of expenditure*	*Current cash limit £000*	*Revised cash limit £000*
XII	3	Universities, etc.	1,840,463	1,843,563

The increase will be charged to the Reserve, so will not add to the public expenditure planning total.

DEFENCE

Air-sea Rescue

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he is in a position to make a statement on the future disposition of Royal Air Force and Royal Navy air-sea rescue detachments in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Freeman: Some parts of our review of the most effective deployment of Royal Air Force and Royal Navy search and rescue helicopters have been completed and announced. Studies into the deployment of the remaining aircraft continue, and I shall tell the House the outcome as soon as possible.

United States Naval Security Group

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has about the function of the additional operational facilities at the United States naval security group activity, Edzell, Scotland, for which funds of $4·2 million were provided in the United States fiscal year 1988 budget.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I understand that funds were requested by the United States navy to provide an extension to an existing building to provide more space for communications facilities, but that the project has been delayed pending complete funding.

Fleet Requirements and Air Direction Unit

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if there are any plans to replace the Hunter and Canberra aircraft currently in service with the fleet requirements and air direction unit by civilian-registered aircraft.

Mr. Freeman: There are at present no plans to replace these aircraft with civilian-registered aircraft.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Falcon 20DC aircraft are provided to support military training under the terms of his Department's contract with Flight Refuelling Ltd. for the operation of the fleet requirements and air direction unit; and whether the contract gives his Department exclusive use of those aircraft.

Mr. Freeman: There are 16 Falcon 20 aircraft used to support military training. The Department has first call, but use is not exclusive.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Dassault Falcon 20DC aircraft are operated by the fleet requirements and air direction unit; when these aircraft entered service; and which type of military aircraft they replaced.

Mr. Freeman: The fleet requirements and air direction unit operates 16 Falcon 20 aircraft. They entered service between February 1985 and February 1987 and they replaced a number of the Hunter and Canberra aircraft used to support military training.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department's current contract with Flight Refuelling Ltd. for the operation of the fleet requirements and air direction unit expires.

Mr. Freeman: There are three current contracts which expire in 1992.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what responsibility he has for the operation of the fleet requirements and air direction unit.

Mr. Freeman: The Secretary of State for Defence is responsible for the operation of the fleet requirements and air direction unit, which provides a service to national and NATO forces under the control of the flag officer naval air command. It is manned and operated under contract to the MOD by Flight Refuelling Ltd.

Benbecula (Low Flying)

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what disciplinary action was taken against the

aircrew of the United States Air Force F111 aircraft involved in a low-flying incident over Benbecula on 12 September 1983.

Mr. Freeman: Disciplinary action following a breach of flying regulations is a matter for the operation nation. My Department has been informed by the United States authorities that appropriate action was taken with regard to this incident.

RAF Benbecula

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defenc what changes have been made to the regulations governing military flying activity in the vicinity of RAF Benbecula since September 1983.

Mr. Freeman: It is not possible without disproportionate effort to list all changes since September 1983 to the regulations governing military flying activity which might have affected flying in the vicinity of RAF Benbecula.

Low-flying Aircraft

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many United Kingdom aircraft engaged in low-flying military exercises in West Germany below 1,000 m in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not available.

Army Vehicles (Lighting)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) of 8 February, *Official Report*, column *81*, whether the regulations controlling the use of Army vehicles on public roads in the hours of darkness without lights also apply to vehicles belonging to United States military forces stationed in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Freeman: Yes.

Foreign Travel

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state the total costs incurred by his Department on foreign travel during the financial year 1987-88 identified by *(a)* ministerial travel and *(b)* travel abroad by civil servants.

Mr. Sainsbury: The cost of foreign air travel by MOD Ministers and their personal staffs during 1987-88 was approximately £69,000, excluding ministerial use of air transport provided by the RAF which is not separately identifiable.

Records are not maintained in a way which would provide separate information on other forms of travel by Ministers or overseas travel by civil servants. The MOD travel votes cover travel by service men as well as civilians and make no distinction between domestic and overseas travel.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Government Expenditure

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of Government spending is cash limited, and what are the main categories which are not.

Mr. Major: Some £63 billion—just over 40 per cent. of the 1988-89 public expenditure planning total of £156·8 billion—is covered by cash limits. In addition, a further £12 billion of expenditure, which mostly finances expenditure included in the planning total, is covered by cash limits. The main categories which are not subject to cash limits are demand-led services (such as supplementary benefits, where once policy and rates of payments have been determined expenditure depends on factors such as the number of claimants coming forward), local authority current expenditure (although most central Government grants to local authorities are covered by cash limits) and the financing of most public corporations (nationalised industries are subject to external financing limits). The coverage of cash limits is discussed more fully in chapter 3 of the "Supply Estimates 1988-89: Summary and Guide" (Cm 328).

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of Government spending is voted by Parliament; and what are the main categories of expenditure outside this.

Mr. Major: The 1988-89 main Supply Estimates seek parliamentary authority for some £83 billion—just over 50 per cent. of the 1988-89 public expenditure planning total of £156·8 billion. In addition a further £25 billion of expenditure in 1988-89 main Estimates will finance payments to bodies whose own expenditure is counted in the planning total. The main categories of expenditure not voted by Parliament are local authority expenditure (although central Government grants to local authorities are included in Supply Estimates), social security expenditure financed directly from the national insurance fund, some payments made direct from the Consolidated Fund, such as contributions to the European Community, and net borrowing by most public corporations. These relationships are set out more fully in the "Supply Estimates 1988-89: Summary and Guide" (Cm 328).

Economic and Finance Council

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the latest meeting of the European Community's Economic and Finance Council.

Mr. Lawson: The Ecofin Council met in Luxembourg on 18 April. I represented the United Kingdom.

The chairman of the Community's economic policy committee presented a preliminary report on economic aspects of the Commission's proposals for abolishing fiscal frontiers. Finance Ministers gave some preliminary views on the report and agreed to discuss the issues further at their informal meeting in May.

In discussion on implementation of the February European Council conclusions on budget discipline, the Council approved in principle a provisional text of a decision on controlling agricultural guarantee and other obligatory expenditure. The Council also agreed possible elements for a draft inter-institutional agreement between

the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission on the development of non-obligatory expenditure over the period 1988 to 1992. Negotiations between representatives of the three institutions are due to take place on 22 April.

The Council received reports by the chairmen of the monetary committee and Committee of Central Bank Governors on the Commission's proposals to liberalise capital movements in the Community. The Council identified a number of issues which Finance Ministers will discuss further.

The Council agreed in substance a derogation for a reduced rate of excise duty for imports of DOM rum into mainland France.

Financial Services

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made in establishing the regulatory regime for the wholesale markets under section 3 of the Financial Services Act.

Mr. Lilley *[pursuant to his reply, 22 July 1987, c. 231-32]*: The Bank of England has now published a paper setting out in detail how it intends to supervise the wholesale markets in sterling, foreign exchange and bullion, together with a copy of the first list of exempted persons established for the purposes of section 43 of the Financial Services Act. Much of the regime, including the Bank's code of conduct defining best market practice, is now operative, although those aspects directly related to the Financial Services Act will come into effect with that Act on 29 April.

In my written answer of 22 July 1987 to my hon. Friend I set out the conditions that the Bank of England intended to impose for admission to its list, and the arrangements for admission to and removal from it, which had been approved by the Treasury. A small number of technical changes have been made to those conditions and arrangements. The revised version of the conditions and arrangements is set out in the Bank's paper; a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Enemy Assets

Mr. Page: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether the Custodians of Enemy Property are to continue to preserve enemy assets.

Mr. Butcher: The Custodians of Enemy Property were asked three years ago to sell all valuable securities which were vested in them. Efforts have recently been made, with some success, to trace and pay the original owners of vested property and those to whom money was originally due, or their successors in title. The custodians have been from time to time directed to pay into the Exchequer money held in the name of former enemies who could not be traced and this process has now been completed.

If a belated claim is now made, any person who proves himself to be an original owner or creditor, or the successor in title to an original owner or creditor, will be paid out of moneys voted by Parliament the amount paid into the Exchequer. This undertaking does not extend to cases where a foreign Government have agreed to meet claims of this kind by their nationals.

North East Shipbuilders Ltd. (Danish Ferry Contract)

Mr. Holt: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether, pursuant to his statement on shipbuilding on 18 April, *Official Report*, column 554, he has anything further to add on the position of the Danish ferry contract with North East Shipbuilders Ltd.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: There has been considerable difficulty with the Danish customer in recent months, arising mainly from the non-payment of instalments. Two weeks ago British Shipbuilders issued a formal demand that the outstanding payments be made by midnight on 20 April. That deadline passed with no payments having been made, and so BS has now cancelled contracts for five of the ferries. North East Shipbuilders will complete the vessels. The other contracts continue as normal.

Voluntary Restraint Agreements

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what guarantees have been given to British Aerospace regarding Her Majesty's Government's future policy towards voluntary restraint agreements with Japan on motor vehicles.

Mr. Atkins: None.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether Her Majesty's Government have given any undertakings to British Aerospace about the Government's future attitude to the voluntary restraint arrangement covering cars and commercial vehicles from Japan.

Mr. Atkins: No.

ENERGY

Foreign Travel

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will state the total costs incurred by his Department on foreign travel during the financial year 1987-88, indentified by *(a)* ministerial travel and *(b)* travel abroad by civil servants.

Mr. Parkinson: The estimated costs of foreign travel by my Department in 1978-88 are about £33,000 for Ministers and their immediate staff and £240,000 for other staff, of which £10,800 and £26,700 respectively will be refunded by the EC.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

European Cinema and Television Year

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to mark the European Community and Council of Europe's European Cinema and Television Year 1988, and particularly, European Cinema Day on 16 June.

Mr. Butcher: The Government are grateful for the energetic efforts of the national committee for European Cinema and Television Year, which I appointed last year, to arrange a small, high-profile series of events backed by our cinema and broadcasting industries to celebrate

European Cinema and Television Year in the United Kingdom. I have arranged for copies of the programme of events which they and many other cinema and television interests in the United Kingdom are arranging during 1988 to be placed in the Library of the House.

The celebration of European Cinema Day on 16 June is a matter for individual cinema owners to decide. I understand however that the Odeon cinema chain is planning to celebrate European Cinema Day during the week of 16 June by opening the projection rooms at some of its cinemas to the public.

Togo

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the current state of trade relations with Togo; and if he has plans to improve them.

Mr. Alan Clark: The level of United Kingdom-Togolese trade is relatively low (in 1987 United Kingdom imports were £2·6 million; United Kingdom exports were £15·4 million), reflecting Togo's current economic difficulties. However, the country remains a useful market for British exporters and it is hoped that our trading links can be maintained and developed.

Foreign Travel

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will state the total costs incurred by his Department on foreign travel during the financial year 1987-88 indentified by *(a)* ministerial travel and *(b)* travel abroad by civil servants.

Mr. Butcher: The costs of travel and subsistence allowances incurred by the DTI on overseas visits during 1987-88 was:

	£000
Ministers and staff in their private offices	148
Remainder of the Department	3,611
	3,759

Certain of the costs are recoverable from the European Community and £299,000 was recovered during 1987-88.

PRIME MINISTER

Members' Correspondence

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister what is her normal practice for dealing with mail addressed to her by right hon. and hon. Members; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I receive an enormous number of letters every week — currently some 5,000 — from Members of Parliament and others. It is not possible for me to deal with all these letters personally, and I must accordingly refer most of them to the Minister and the Department with the responsibility for the policy in question.

Business Travel

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister when she last travelled by British Rail on official business.

The Prime Minister: In February 1987.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Staff Statistics

Mr. Allen Adams: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what is the number of staff employed on an agency basis by the House of Commons Commission.

Mr. Beith: Agency staff are employed on a regular basis in the Refreshment Department to replace permanent staff who are absent as a result of illness, and so on. In the main they cover the duties of porters, general assistants and waiters-waitresses. On average, some 21 such agency staff are employed per week during the period when the House is sitting.

Mr. Allen Adams: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will give the number of staff employed by the House of Commons Commission who have left in the last 12 months.

Mr. Beith: The number of staff employed by the Commission who have resigned, retired or died in the 12-month period 1 April 1987 to 31 March 1988 is 125.

Mr. Allen Adams: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what was the number of hours of overtime worked by staff employed by the House of Commons Commission in the last year.

Mr. Beith: The information is not available centrally in the form requested and, because overtime is paid at different rates, it could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The total charge for all overtime paid to House of Commons staff in 1987-88 was £215,503. This figure does not include various night, late duty and shift allowances paid to staff which together amounted to £449,791.

Mr. Allen Adams: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what is the average hourly rate paid to staff employed on an hourly basis by the House of Commons Commission; and what is the average hourly rate paid to staff employed on an agency basis by the Commission.

Mr. Beith: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Foreign Travel

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will state the total costs incurred by the Privy Council Office on foreign travel during the financial year 1987-88 identified by *(a)* ministerial travel and *(b)* travel abroad by civil servants.

Mr. Wakeham: No costs were incurred by the Privy Council Office on foreign travel during the financial year 1987-88.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Sergei Zherdev

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department has raised with the Soviet authorities the case of Sergei Zherdev; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We regularly make representations to the Soviet authorities on behalf of refuseniks such as Sergei Zherdev. My right hon. and learned Friend again raised the issue of Soviet citizens denied permission to emigrate in February during his talks with Mr. Shevardnadze in Moscow.

Togo

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current state of relations with Togo including diplomatic representation; and if he has any plans to improve them.

Mrs. Chalker: The United Kingdom enjoys good relations with Togo. The British high commissioner in Accra is also Her Majesty's ambassador to Togo. There are no present plans to change this.

Departmental Achievements

Sir John Biggs-Davison: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the main achievements of his Department since 1979 with regard to the European Community.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) on 19 April.

Chile

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations Her Majesty's ambassador to Chile has made regarding freedom of expression and association in Chile in the period before the elections, and the conditions in which the opposition operate;

(2) what representations he has made to the Chilean Government on the presidential elections with regard to freedom of choice to Chilean citizens and the free conduct of any electoral campaign.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend and I made our views on these matters known directly to the Chilean Foreign Minister last October, as did my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, both privately and publicly, during his own visit to Chile in January. Our ambassador in Santiago also discusses them frequently with the Chilean Government. I refer the hon. Member, additionally, to the statement made by the 12 members of the European Community on 9 October 1987, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. We believe it would help considerably if the Chilean Government lifted the state of emergency in advance of the plebiscite to allow the democratic opposition greater freedom to campaign peacefully.

Foreign Travel

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will state the total costs incurred by his Department on foreign travel during the financial year 1987-88, identified by *(a)* ministerial travel and *(b)* travel abroad by civil servants.

Mr. Eggar: The forecast outturn for spending on ministerial travel by both wings of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the financial year 1987-88 is estimated to be £0·8 million and for travel abroad by civil servants £12·2 million. These figures exclude transfer and leave journeys.

UNITA

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he has had any meetings with, made approaches to, or received approaches from Dr. Jonas Savimbi or representatives of UNITA since 1983;

(2) what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards UNITA.

Mrs. Chalker: There has been occasional contact with UNITA representatives at official level for humanitarian reasons.

Angola

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent diplomatic initiatives seeking an end to the civil war in Angola.

Mrs. Chalker: We wish to see all foreign troops withdrawn from Angola, and support the United States-led negotiations as the most practical means of ending the civil war.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the implications for stability in Southern Africa of South Africa's policy towards Angola.

Mrs. Chalker: South Africa's present policy towards Angola contributes to instability in Southern Africa. We have called repeatedly upon South Africa to withdraw its forces from Angola and to respect Angola's territorial integrity.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he has recently made any approaches to, or received approaches from, the Soviet Union with regard to a peaceful settlement in Angola;

(2) when he last discussed Angola with the Government of the Soviet Union.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Gardiner) on 2 March.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has recently made any approaches to, or received approaches from the South African Government with regard to a peaceful settlement in Angola.

Mrs. Chalker: We regularly point out to the South African Government the need for a peaceful settlement and for the withdrawal of their troops from Angola.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the implications for stability in southern Africa of the Soviet Union's policy towards Angola.

Mrs. Chalker: The Soviet Union is well aware of our view that the stability of the region would be significantly improved by a negotiated end to the war in Angola involving the withdrawal of all foreign troops.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Research and Development

Mr. Doran: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has received the Barnes report on research and development in the agriculture industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: Yes, but in other respects I cannot yet add to the reply given to the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) on 1 March at column *546*.

Forestry Grant

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will state the area of land approved for foresty grant-aid in each of the six years to 31 March in each county in England.

Mr. Gummer: The information is not readily available by counties, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Bees

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to the answer of 13 April, *Official Report*, column *156*, in respect of how many of the 132 incidents of honey bee poisoning in England and Wales arising from the misuse of pesticides, offenders have been detected and prosecuted, and how many of the honey bee owners have sought compensation for the damage to their bees and produce.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 21 April 1988]:* While our investigation arrangements are able to determine pathological effect and its causes, they do not directly establish whether a case arose through pesticide misuse or whether an offence has been committed under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986. No prosecutions have taken place to date relating to the poisoning of honey bees.

I am unable to say how many of the honey bees' owners have sought compensation for the damage to their bees and produce, since such action falls within the province of the civil law.

Canary Seed, Buckwheat and Millet

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the purpose of the EEC proposal to levy a tax on imported canary seed, buckwheat and millet; what would be the amount of the proposed tax; and whether Her Majesty's Government treat this proposal as falling to be considered under the Single European Act by majority vote.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 21 April 1988]:* The Commission is proposing to align import levies on canary seed, buckwheat and millet with those on barley; it has argued that the existing arrangements, under which separate import levies are fixed for each of these cereals, is difficult to monitor, given the limited quantities traded on the world market, and that its proposal would simplify the system. Current rates of levy are £66·83 per tonne for buckwheat, £95·61 per tonne for millet and £42·69 per tonne for canary seed; if the Commission's proposal was adopted all these cereals would be subject to the import levy for barley, which currently stands at £115·23 per tonne. The proposal is made under article 43 of the treaty of Rome, and as such may be adopted by a qualified majority.

EMPLOYMENT

"Training for Employment"

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to paragraph 2.8 of the paper entitled "Training for Employment", if he will publish *(a)* the breakdown of the 700,000 vacancies by standard region and *(b)* the breakdown by standard region of the socio-economic, and industrial groups of the 7·5 million recruits; and if he will place a copy of the full report from IFF Research Ltd. in the Library.

Mr. Fowler: Results of the recent survey by IFF Research Limited were published in the April 1988 edition of *Employment Gazette*, a copy of which is in the Library. This includes some analysis by region, and also by occupation, of the approximately 7·4 million vacancies filled during 1987. The nature of the survey limits the scope for more detailed analysis. The estimate of 700,000 vacancies in a typical month cannot be broken down reliably by region because of the seasonal nature of the data collected in January. A full report on the survey is not yet available.

Small Inventory Top Tier Sites

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the Health and Safety Executive's estimate of the number of CIMAH small inventory top tier sites, SITTS, which have been removed from liability under the control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations since 1986; how many of the remaining small inventory top tier sites have submitted emergency plans and issued information to the public; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is not aware of any small inventory top tier sites which have been removed from liability under the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations since 1986.

The HSE is aware of 21 small inventory top tier sites where the occupiers have completed offsite emergency plans and 14 sites where information has been issued to the public.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on age discrimination by employers; and what steps have been taken by his Department to discourage such discrimination.

Mr. Lee: The Government believe that employers should select applicants for jobs on the basis of suitability. Where employers impose age limits, staff in jobcentres and the Professional and Executive Recruitment offices may ask them to consider whether they are justified. However, age can in certain circumstances have a bearing on suitability and employers are normally in the best position to judge if this is so.

Enterprise in Higher Education

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he anticipates announcing the first institution to be involved in the Manpower Services Commission-sponsored Enterprise in Higher Education projects.

Mr. Cope: It is anticipated that an announcement will be made in July.

Companies (Blacklists)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has as to which companies are blacklisted by the Trades Union Congress.

Mr. Nicholls: None.

YTS

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the qualifications obtained by those trainees on YTS scheme who have stayed into their second year.

Mr. Cope: A list of qualifications obtained by YTS trainees who stayed into their second year is given in the table.

A national survey of trainees who stayed into their second year shows that 98 per cent. of all trainees had trained for a qualification during their first year on the scheme and 54 per cent. of all trainees had gained a qualification. The significant number of trainees gaining qualifications through YTS represents an important step towards the Government's target that all young people should enter the labour market with a qualification.

Survey of YTS trainees entering their second year of training by September 1987
Percentage of all trainees gaining a qualification by type of qualification gained[1]

	Percentage
RSA Basic	5
RSA/Pitmans grade 1	10
RSA or Pitmans 2/3	3
City and Guilds foundation/general	17
City and Guilds grade 1 or above	27
BTeC general or first cert	9
BTeC national or TeC 2	3
SCOTVEC modules	8
CPVE	1
Academic (CSE/GCE etc)	9
Others	28

[1] Some trainees obtained more than one qualification. (Mainly qualifications awarded by industry training boards.)

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of black participants get jobs on leaving the YTS.

Mr. Cope: The latest results from the Manpower Services Commission's follow-up survey of all YTS leavers show that 42 per cent. of black participants who left YTS schemes between April 1986 and October 1987 were in jobs at the time of the surveys.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give a breakdown of the occupations of those on the enterprise allowance scheme.

Mr. Cope: The table shows the breakdown of businesses run by entrants to the enterprise allowance scheme in the 1987-88 financial year.

Business	*Percentage*
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	2·28
Manufacturing	26·11
Distribution	24·06
Hotels and Catering	0·88
Repair of Goods	0·36
Transport	4·44
Business Services	8·49
Other business services	29·54
Not elsewhere classified	3·84

Compact Initiative

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment why the recent compact initiative was restricted to 12 areas and if he will consider extending it to any area which requests one.

Mr. Cope: We are offering support to 15 inner city compacts (including two in Scotland and one in Wales) in order to test the concept in areas of greatest need. If large numbers of viable proposals are put forward, we shall review the scale of future funding.

Manpower Services Commission

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what have been the headings of Manpower Services Commission expenditure from 1979 to date.

Mr. Cope: The headings of MSC expenditure from 1979 to date can be found in the Supply Estimates for those years, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list all Manpower Services Commission run or funded courses from 1979 to the current date.

Mr. Cope: The Manpower Services Commission has run or funded a large variety of courses and programmes since 1979. A comprehensive list of all courses and programmes run since 1979 can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his policy towards Manpower Services Commission involvement in industrial relations training.

Mr. Cope: The Manpower Services Commission is involved in industrial relations training as part of its work in management training and development. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State considers proposals from the Manpower Services Commission on these, and other areas, on their merits.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what is the relationship between the Manpower Services Commission and the industrial relations training resource centre;

(2) what public funds are provided to the industrial relations training resource centre; and from what sources;

(3) what relationship the Manpower Services Commission has with *(a)* the Oxford Centre for Management Studies, and *(b)* the Employee Relations Associates.

Mr. Cope: The Industrial Relations Training Resource Centre no longer exists, but its work is continued by the organisation known as Employment Relations Associates. The Oxford Centre for Management Studies has now been subsumed within Templeton college.

The Commission has contracts with both bodies for management development projects. It is understood that Employment Relations Associates receives no other public funds.

Investment Capital and Industry (North-West)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures and initiatives are being undertaken in the north-west to attract investment capital and industry; and if he will publish a table of capital investment in real terms showing the percentage increase this sum represents from May 1979 to the latest available date.

Mr. Atkins: I have been asked to reply.

My Department offers a range of incentives under its recently launched enterprise initiative which are designed to encourage industrial and commercial development in the north-west and elsewhere. The information sought by the hon. Member about capital investment is as follows. For the standard economic planning region of the north-west (which excludes Cumbria) the figures in the table imply the following percentage changes in manufacturing net capital expenditure from the 1979 base year figure of £971 million.

£ million (1979 prices)

Calendar year	*Expenditure*	*Per cent. change since 1979*
1980	864	−11·0
1981	609	−37·3
1982	566	−41·7
1983	594	−38·8
1984	664	−31·6
1985	700	−27·9
1986	606	−37·6

HOME DEPARTMENT

AIDS

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in the light of recent research undertaken amongst drug addicts by the communicable disease surveillance unit in Glasgow, he will now introduce legislation to make the passing of HIV infection knowingly or deliberately a criminal offence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: As my hon. Friend is aware, we have considered most carefully whether to propose new offences of this kind. For the present, however, it is still our conclusion that new offences would not materially assist in preventing the transmission of the virus and could discourage potential carriers from coming forward for testing.

Pensioners (Petition)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now issue his observations on the petition from pensioners from Nottingham, North constituency presented to the House on 28 March.

Mr. Renton: As we have made clear to the House on a number of occasions, we do not consider that there is a good case for providing free or concessionary television licences for all pensioners.

Computer Information (Access)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what access *(a)* police officers, and *(b)* Government agencies have to copies or originals of (i) computerised logs of telephone calls kept at new digital exchanges, and (ii) computerised logs of calls kept at individual switchboards.

Mr. Hurd: I refer the hon. Member to the provisions of the Interception of Communications Act 1985.

EC (Passports)

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans for the new EEC British passport to be issued from the Petty France office.

Mr. Renton: Our present plans are for the London passport office to be computerised, and to begin issuing the new version of the British passport, machine-readable, and in the EC common format, from December 1989.

Police Cells (Doncaster)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the numbers of prisoners on remand transferred from London courts to Doncaster police cells; what types of offences they have been charged with; and how many are in each category.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On Wednesday 20 April, 24 prisoners remanded in custody by courts in the London area were held in police cells in Doncaster. Ten of these prisoners had been charged with theft, five with burglary, four with robbery and firearms offences, three with occasioning actual bodily harm and two with drug-related offences.

Leeds Prison

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he intends to reduce prison overcrowding in respect of Leeds prison; what information he has about the current level of overcrowding at that prison; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 19 April 1,354 prisoners were held at Her Majesty's prison Leeds compared with a certified normal accommodation of 642.

Leeds prison, in common with other local prisons, is seriously overcrowded. We have sought to provide such

measures of relief as is possible under present circumstances by diverting some remand prisoners elsewhere and by a sustained effort to move convicted prisoners to training establishments as soon as places become available.

In the longer term, Leeds prison will also benefit from the prison building programme. Five hundred and forty-two new places will be provided at the prison in early 1991. As well as providing some additional accommodation, this will enable a programme of refurbishment of the existing blocks to proceed. Redevelopment will be completed by late 1996.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Thames Valley police as to whether the late Michael Ryan used firearms possessed by police officers of the Thames Valley police on any occasion.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The chief constable of Thames Valley has no information to that effect.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call on a report from the chief constable of Thames Valley police as to on how many occasions the Police Complaints Board had submitted requests for files and papers or information to the chief constable in the course of investigating complaints made into events *(a)* leading up to and *(b)* involving the shootings by the late Michael Ryan on 19 August 1987, and as to what response he has made, giving dates on which such material was submitted.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable that the investigation is being carried out under the supervision of the Police Complaints Authority; there is frequent discussion between the investigation team and the authority about the course of the investigation and the evidence to be obtained.

Concerts (Codification)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in the light of distress caused to young people who attended Alice Cooper concerts, he will seek powers to require the codification of live performances so that the public and parents may be better informed when deciding whether to attend.

Mr. John Patten: District and London borough councils have power in licensing premises for public entertainment under the Local Government (Miscellaneous) Provisions Act 1982 and the London Government Act 1963, to impose conditions concerning the nature of entertainments permitted on those premises.

Foreign Travel

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state the total costs incurred by his Department on foreign travel during the financial year 1987-88, identified by *(a)* ministerial travel and *(b)* travel abroad by civil servants.

Mr. Hurd: The expenditure in 1987-88 was approximately *(a)* £36,000 by Ministers; and *(b)* £464,000 by officials.

Immigration

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the total numbers of persons who were on temporary admission to the United Kingdom in *(a)* 1985, *(b)* 1986, *(c)* 1987 and *(d)* since 1 January respectively.

Mr. Renton *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* In 1987, a total of 7,517 persons were granted temporary admission to the United Kingdom: information for the first quarter of 1988 is not yet available. The figures for 1985 and 1986 were on a different basis which separately identified those granted temporary admission being further examination, from those granted temporary admission after being refused entry, with the result that those granted temporary admission under both circumstances were counted twice. The figures are as follows; comprehensive data are not available for the first three months of 1985.

Number of passengers granted temporary admission

Year	*Pending further examination*	*After being refused entry*
1985 April to December	6,746	6,595
1986	12,414	10,757

Visas

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for visitors' visas, were refused in the United Kingdom posts in *(a)* Bombay, *(b)* New Dehli, *(c)* Dacca, *(d)* Islamabad and *(e)* Calcutta in (i) 1985, (ii) 1986, (iii) 1987 and (iv) since 1 January, respectively.

Mr. Renton *[holding answer 18 April]:* The information requested for 1985-87 is given in the following table; the corresponding information for the first quarter of 1988 is not yet available. Since 15 October 1986, citizens of India, Bangladesh and Pakistan wishing to visit the United Kingdom have been required to obtain a visa before setting out. Before that date, the examination of a passenger's eligibility for entry normally took place on arrival at a United Kingdom port although it was open to a visitor to apply for an optional entry clearance at a post overseas. The increase in refusals of visit entry clearances at posts in the Indian sub-continent since October 1986 has therefore been accompanied by a fall of results at the ports. Congestion at the ports has been substantially reduced, as I explained in answer to a Question from the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Mr. Wheeler) on 29 March, column 387.

Persons refused a visit entry clearance

Post	*1985*	*1986*		*1987*
		January to September	*October to December*	
Bombay	50	30	100	1,100
New Dehli	80	90	360	3,620
Calcutta	[1]—	10	[1]—	90
Dhaka	560	350	600	1,670
Islamabad	40	20	440	5,230

[1] Five or fewer.

Crime Prevention

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further action he proposes to take to *(a)* increase crime prevention measures and *(b)* reduce the incidence of offences of public order.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 19 April]:* A wide range of crime prevention initiatives are successfully underway to both national and local level. The energy and enthusiasm of those concerned is evident and we are determined that this should be further encouraged and that where initiatives are successful in preventing crime and in reducing the fear of crime, experience and good practice is made known to all.

At national level, the ministerial group on crime prevention and the standing conference on crime prevention have important roles in co-ordinating policies and exchanging ideas. The new national crime prevention publicity campaign, launched last month, will run for the next three years. The handbook, "Practical Ways to Crack Crime", launched as part of the campaign, is full of practical crime prevention measures for all members and sectors of the community.

To support and encourage local crime prevention activity, including neighbourhood watch, we will shortly announce details of a new crime prevention organisation.

Our safer cities programme, launched last month as part of the Government's action for cities initiative, will build on and take further a wide range of earlier work which has shown what can be done to prevent crime by concerted and determined local action. Twenty safer cities projects will be established over a three year period in high crime urban areas.

The Public Order Act 1986 strengthened the law on public order in many respects. We have put before Parliament proposals to improve controls on the possession of firearms and shotguns, to prohibit the sale of specified offensive weapons, and to make it an offence to be in possession of a knife in a public place without good reason. We shall continue to strengthen the police to enable them to deal effectively with public order offences as well as other crimes.

Police Raids (Media Notification)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to whether the *London Evening Standard* was advised in advance by the Metropolitan police of the raid on alleged Jamaica-based racketeers on the night of 13-14 April; what procedures for prior notification of the media about police activity which may lead to arrests in the presence of representatives of broadcasting and newspapers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the *London Evening Standard* was advised in advance that a police operation of this kind was to take place. Detailed information on the nature of the operation and the location was not provided to it until the raid occurred.

Decisions of this kind are operational ones for the chief officer concerned. I understand that the Metropolitan Police practice is to give advance notification to the media when, having balanced the need to inform the public against the interests of the individuals involved, this seems the most appropriate course of action.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Chiropody

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will make a statement on the future of the chiropody service;

(2) if he will make a statement on the future of the chiropody profession.

(3) if he will make a statement on the future of the chiropody profession.

(4) when he intends to reply to the questions tabled by the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East on the future of the chiropody services in January and February; and if he will give the reasons for the delay.

Mrs. Currie: We have been considering various issues concerning chiropody in the light of the comments sought from health authorities on the Cartwright report on the chiropody needs of the elderly, "More Trouble with Feet", published in September 1986. I regret that this has led to a delay in replying to my hon. Friend's earlier questions. I hope shortly to do so more fully, but I should make it clear that, in the absence of agreement within the profession itself, we have no plans for legislation on the issue of protection of title. We have indicated in the White Paper "Promoting Better Health" that we see a place for chiropody within the primary care team in future.

Mentally Handicapped and Mentally Ill Patients

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the levels of staff employed in the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale Health Authority Area working with *(a)* mentally handicapped and *(b)* mentally ill patients for each year from 1979 to 1987, inclusive.

Mrs. Currie: Information held centrally is as follows:

Medical and Nursing Staff employed in Mental Illness and Mental Handicap, areas of work Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale district health authority at 30 September of each year[1]

whole-time equivalents[2]

Year	*Mental illness*	*Mental handicap*
1982	200	737
1983	221	730
1984	224	745
1985	219	831
1986	230	844

Source: DHSS Annual Censuses of NHS Medical and Non-Medical Manpower.

[1] Includes medical permanent paid and honorary staff. Excludes locums. Excludes consultants and senior registrars whose contracts are held by the Regional Health Authority. Excludes agency nursing and midwifery staff.

[2] All figures are individually rounded to the nearest (10) ten whole-time equivalents.

AIDS

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what warning his Department makes available to pregnant nurses about the risks of cytomegalovirus in the course of their caring for AIDS patients;

(2) what information he has on the number of nurses infected with cytomegalovirus in the course of their caring for AIDS patients.

Mr. Newton: The scientific advice which the Department has received is that cytomegalovirus does not present an occupational hazard to nurses or other female staff caring for patients with CMV infection, including patients with AIDS.

Studies of hospital nurses working with patients known to be excreting cytomegalovirus have shown no increased risk of infection in these nurses compared with women of similar ages working in other occupations.

The most effective means by which all women, including nurses, who are either pregnant or planning a pregnancy, can protect themselves from infection with cytomegalovirus is by careful attention to personal hygiene, for example, hand washing. This is basic to standard safe working practices for all nursing staff.

National Health Service Buildings and Land

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the buildings and land in the ownership of the National Health Service for which he has given permission to be sold off in the last 10 years.

Mrs. Currie: In the 10 years from 1977-78 to 1986-87 just over 8,000 acres have been sold and some £388 million has been realised. Proceeds for 1987-88 are expected to be in the region of £200 million. Regional health authorities have been directed to carry out the Secretary of State's functions in the acquisition and disposal of land and his permission to sell land is not required. Details of individual sales are not routinely collected centrally and could not be obtained without disproportionate expense.

Abortion

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many abortions were carried out in Great Britain in the years 1971, 1981 and 1987 in the following categories: *(a)* under 16 years, *(b)* 16 to 19 years, *(c)* 20 to 34 years and *(d)* 35 years and over; what proportion was carried out in (i) National Health Service hospitals or (ii) private hospitals or others; and if he will break down this information *(x)* nationally, *(y)* regionally and *(z)* for Don Valley constituency.

Mr. Newton: As data for 1987 are not yet available, the tables show figures for 1986. For reasons of maintaining confidentiality, statistics for constituency wards are not released. The remaining information requested is given in the tables, together with readily available statistics for Doncaster health district and district health authority.

Notifications of abortions carried out under the Abortion Act 1967 in Great Britain, by age, region of usual residence and category of premises. 1971, 1981, 1986
Numbers and percentages

	Age group				*Category of premises*				
	under 16	*16-19*	*20-34*	*35 and over*	*NHS*	*per cent.*	*non-NHS*	*per cent.*	*Total*
Year 1986									
Great Britain	4,547	40,409	114,296	22,561	76,882	42·3	104,953	57·7	181,835
England and Wales	4,240	37,897	108,542	21,585	67,529	39·2	104,757	60·8	172,286
Scotland	307	2,512	5,754	976	9,353	97·9	196	2·1	9,549
Area of usual residence									
Wales	179	1,700	3,943	924	4,083	60·5	2,663	39·5	6,746
Regional Health Authority:									
Northern	257	1,600	3,667	739	5,347	85·4	916	14·6	6,263
Yorkshire	296	2,248	4,924	1,048	3,252	38·2	5,265	61·8	8,517
Trent	417	2,737	6,244	1,391	6,251	57·9	4,540	42·1	10,791
East Anglian	176	1,177	2,633	676	3,750	80·4	912	19·6	4,662
North West Thames	185	2,640	11,100	1,841	5,721	36·3	10,049	63·7	15,770
North East Thames	277	3,225	11,704	1,890	7,870	46·0	9,233	54·0	17,103
South East Thames	254	2,775	9,356	1,415	5,592	40·5	8,210	59·5	13,802
South West Thames	197	2,036	6,597	1,351	3,546	34·8	6,637	65·2	10,183
Wessex	241	1,858	3,958	886	2,974	42·8	3,969	57·2	6,943
Oxford	190	1,661	4,094	892	3,550	51·9	3,288	48·1	6,838
South Western	227	1,773	3,909	903	5,154	75·7	1,658	24·3	6,812
West Midlands	534	3,991	9,278	1,981	2,923	18·5	12,862	81·5	15,785
Mersey	140	1,728	4,218	739	3,089	45·3	3,736	54·7	6,825
North Western	324	2,670	6,352	1,231	4,349	41·1	6,230	58·9	10,579
District Health Authority:									
Doncaster	35	206	464	88	578	72·9	215	27·1	793
Year 1981									
Great Britain	4,151	39,102	103,935	23,631	70,087	40·9	101,400	59·1	171,487
England and Wales	3,949	36,623	98,773	22,467	61,276	37·7	101,204	62·3	162,480
Scotland	202	2,479	5,162	1,164	8,811	97·8	196	2·2	9,007
Area of usual residence									
Wales	154	1,621	3,432	1,121	3,757	59·2	2,584	40·8	6,341
Regional Health Authority:									
Northern	200	1,548	3,037	749	4,913	88·5	641	11·5	5,554
Yorkshire	266	1,985	4,086	1,104	2,961	39·6	4,511	60·4	7,472

	Age group				Category of premises				
	under 16	*16-19*	*20-34*	*35 and over*	*NHS*	*per cent.*	*non-NHS*	*per cent.*	*Total*
Trent	353	2,607	5,311	1,535	5,391	54·8	4,446	45·2	9,837
East Anglian	127	960	2,177	632	2,992	76·5	921	23·5	3,913
North West Thames	234	2,798	9,779	1,911	5,967	40·3	8,830	59·7	14,797
North East Thames	271	3,021	9,187	1,745	7,204	50·4	7,092	49·6	14,296
South East Thames	310	2,658	6,793	1,470	5,517	48·8	5,782	51·2	11,299
South West Thames	174	1,955	5,301	1,263	3,364	38·5	5,364	61·5	8,728
Wessex	206	1,505	3,065	863	2,918	51·6	2,738	48·4	5,656
Oxford	160	1,435	3,121	903	2,913	51·6	2,732	48·4	5,645
South Western	212	1,583	3,383	889	4,676	76·5	1,433	23·5	6,109
West Midlands	482	3,809	7,811	2,040	3,011	21·2	11,197	78·8	14,208
Mersey	111	1,521	3,141	726	1,683	30·5	3,837	69·5	5,520
North Western	271	2,387	5,282	1,245	3,836	41·7	5,370	58·3	9,206
Health District:									
Doncaster	36	231	383	97	629	84·0	120	16·0	749
Year 1971									
Great Britain	2,837	23,966	81,040	22,990	59,955	45·0	73,155	55·0	133,110
England and Wales	2,618	22,872	77,481	21,529	53,706	42·4	73,071	57·6	126,777
Scotland	219	1,094	3,559	1,461	6,249	98·7	84	1·3	6,333
Area of usual residence									
Wales	119	899	2,764	998	3,781	78·8	1,017	21·2	4,798
Hospital regions:									
Newcastle	140	943	2,779	1,119	4,661	92·2	396	7·8	5,057
Leeds	133	911	2,369	908	2,384	54·3	2,009	45·7	4,393
Sheffield	242	1,398	3,805	1,410	4,038	58·0	2,924	42·0	6,962
East Anglian	105	623	1,867	646	2,424	74·0	853	26·0	3,277
North West Metropolitan	207	2,264	9,464	2,027	6,740	47·0	7,603	53·0	14,343
North East Metropolitan	129	1,245	4,008	1,159	3,715	54·8	3,067	45·2	6,782
South East Metropolitan	196	1,503	4,646	1,229	5,328	69·1	2,387	30·9	7,715
South West Metropolitan	170	1,645	6,475	1,172	3,831	39·6	5,852	60·4	9,683
Wessex	113	636	1,715	564	1,824	59·0	1,265	41·0	3,089
Oxford	114	732	1,846	597	2,026	60·7	1,309	39·3	3,335
South Western	175	1,168	2,761	936	3,569	69·4	1,577	30·6	5,146
Birmingham	238	2,179	5,578	1,645	2,331	23·9	7,436	76·1	9,767
Manchester	167	1,409	4,071	1,336	5,027	70·9	2,068	29·1	7,095
Liverpool	48	621	1,812	597	1,776	56·8	1,352	43·2	3,128

Teaching Hospitals

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if the Government will ensure, in its review of the National Health Service, that resources to meet the costs of teaching hospitals which relate to their university functions are separated from the main allocations of resources to the district health authorities concerned.

Mr. Moore: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to him on 15 April at column *263*. I cannot anticipate the outcome of the Government's review.

Ambulances (Emergency Calls)

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list, for metropolitan and county ambulance authorities, the percentage of emergency calls not meeting response time standards.

Mrs. Currie: Information about the percentage of emergency calls where ambulance authorities meet the response time standards is contained in the package of Health Service indicators produced by the Department. The latest information, for 1986-87, is now in the Library.

RAWP Levels

Mr. Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what assessment he has made of the effect on the Nottingham health authority of revising the RAWP allocation formula so that its resources are either frozen or not increased to the 100 per cent. funding level.

Mr. Newton: None.

Project 2000

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he can now make a statement on his response to Project 2000 report on the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting; and if he will make a further statement on the Government's new countrywide campaign to encourage former nurses to return to work and to recruit and retain new nurses.

Mr. Newton: The Government are considering proposals from the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for the reform of nurse education and training. We hope to be in a position to respond in the near future.

The national nurse publicity campaign and the careers literature, videos an exhibition materials produced by the Department are being revised and will be extended to support local activity in regions and districts including campaigns to attract back those nurses who have left the service. I also recently launched the joint DHSS-*Nursing Times* "Recruit and Retain" campaign which is to run through 1988 with the aim of increasing awareness and

understanding of the recruitment and retention challenge and to spread good practice in recruitment and manpower planning among Health Service managers.

Nurses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give figures by regional health authorities of the number of people over 60 years needing nursing care at the end of 1987; what the projected figures are for 1995 and 2000; and if he will make a statement on how he intends to ensure that there are enough nurses of the right quality to care for the elderly in the future.

Mr. Newton: The information requested about the number of people over 60 years requiring nursing care at the end of 1987 and projected figures for 1995 and 2000, is not available. On the question of ensuring that there are enough nurses of the right quality to care for the elderly in the future, I refer the hon. Member to my replies to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 18 March 1988 at column *706*.

Social Work Training

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what consideration his Department is giving to proposals for changes in social work training; if there is any action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We have been considering, in conjunction with other relevant Departments, proposals put forward by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work. I hope shortly to write to the council's chairman with our views on the most appropriate way to make progress in the improvement of social work training.

Eye Tests

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the cost of exempting all pensioners from the proposed charges for eye tests, over and above those already exempt.

Mr. Newton: We estimate that the additional cost (England) of retaining free NHS sight tests for people of pensionable age who are not otherwise eligible would be approximately £22 million a year.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claimants in the Sunderland area covered by *(a)* Dunn house and *(b)* Phoenix house, have been denied invalidity benefit and required to sign as available for light work in the periods (i) January to April, (ii) May to August and (iii) September to December for the years 1979, 1981, 1983, 1985, 1987 and 1988.

Mr. Scott: I regret that the information requested is available only at disproportionate cost. If the hon. Member has a particular case in mind, perhaps he would write to me.

Retirement Pension

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the value in real terms of the basic retirement pension with effect from 11 April, taking November 1978 as the base and calculated according to the rise in average earnings between then and the latest month for which information is available.

Mr. Scott: If the basic retirement pension had been increased in line with the overall increase in earnings between November 1978 and September 1987, the end of the period measured for the April 1988 uprating, the level of pension in April 1988 would be £47·10.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the additional cost of abolishing the contribution conditions for the basic retirement pension for those aged 65 years or over.

Mr. Scott: The gross additional cost of abolishing the contribution conditions for basic retirement pension for those over state pension age would be about £2,500 million in 1988-89. Figures for those aged 65 or over are not available.

Social Security Act 1986

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will outline in detail what proposals he has for monitoring the implementation and impact of the Social Security Act 1986, which will be carried out directly by his Department or by other research bodies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The objectives for the reforms enacted by the Social Security Act 1986 were set out in the Government's Green and White Papers, "Reform of Social Security" (Cmnd. numbers 9517 and 9691). Achievement of these objectives is being monitored using information derived from the Department's statistical and management returns, from expenditure data, from local authority returns and from the family expenditure and general household surveys.

A research project into maternity rights and benefits carried out by the Policy Studies Institute under the joint sponsorship of DHSS, Department of Employment and the Equal Opportunities Commission will start later this year. We also intend to commission independent research to start in spring 1989 into the extent to which the social fund is meeting its objectives and are considering a number of further research projects in other benefit areas.

Severe Disablement Allowance

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the increase in the number of persons receiving severe disablement allowance and in its annual cost if the disablement conditions were those prevailing before the inroduction of the 80 per cent. disability test.

Mr. Scott: Up to April 1987 (the latest date for which statistics are available) some 16,000 claims to severe disablement allowance (SDA) had been disallowed because they did not satisfy the 80 per cent. disablement condition. It is not possible to say how many of these people would have satisfied the conditions for the non-contributory invalidity pension which was replaced by SDA in November 1984. The gross annual cost of paying 16,000 claims to SDA would be some £21 million.

Cancelled Operations

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the total numbers of cancelled operations for the first day of each month for the last six months; and if he will give the reasons for those cancellations.

Mr. Newton: Such information has not been collected centrally in the past. Data on the number of scheduled theatre sessions cancelled are being collected from 1987-88 and figures for that year will be available in September.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the latest figures for the total number of operations cancelled on 14 March and 15 March, and if he will break that total down into *(a)* operations cancelled due to the industrial action and *(b)* operations cancelled for reasons other than the industrial action.

Mr. Newton: I have nothing to add to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr. Watts) on 17 March at column *681*. Information on cancellation of operations generally is not held centrally.

Foreign Travel

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will state the total costs incurred by his Department on foreign travel during the financial year 1987-88 identified by *(a)* ministerial travel and *(b)* travel abroad by civil servants.

Mr. Moore: The information is not available in precisely the form requested. The total cost incurred by my Department on Foreign travel during the financial year 1987-88 was £733,864·53, of which £28,901·34 related to travel by Ministers and staff of the private offices.

Nursing Homes

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultations were carried out with health authorities with regard to the availability of extra hospital beds to cater for patients that need nursing care but who are not now able to enter or be discharged from nursing homes because they own or have not disposed of their own house.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 18 April 1988]:* The possession of property does not prevent someone from being admitted on a permanent basis to a nursing home, or remaining in a nursing home, but ownership of property valued over £6,000 net will mean there is no entitlement to income support.

SCOTLAND

Environmental Health Departments

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are employed in the environmental health department of each district council.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Child Care

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what child care provision his Department provides for pre-school age children of the Department's employees; what child care provision, for school holiday and/or after-school care, is provided for employees' children aged five and over; what plans there are for increasing provision in the next five years; and how these are to be funded.

Mr. Rifkind: My Department does not provide child care facilities and has at present no plans to provide any. It has, however, publicised such facilities provided by others as have come to notice.

Holidays

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has any figures for the numbers of Scottish people holidaying abroad.

Mr. Lang: The British Tourist Authority collects information on a United Kingdom basis but separate figures are not available for Scotland.

Tourism

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the annual budget of the Scottish tourist board for the years 1979 to 1988.

Mr. Lang: The information is as follows:

Financial year	*Outturn £ million*
1979-80	4·2
1980-81	5·2
1981-82	6·1
1982-83	7·1
1983-84	8·1
1984-85	10·0
1985-86	8·7
1986-87	9·1
1987-88	9·0
1988-89	[1]9·9

[1] Provisional.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is estimate of the number of tourists who have visited Scotland in the years 1979 to 1988.

Mr. Lang: Estimates from the Scottish tourist board and the the international passenger survey on visitor trips to Scotland since 1979 are as follows:

million

	Overseas	*United Kingdom visitors*	*Total*
1979	1·0	11·5	12·5
1980	1·0	11·7	12·7
1981	0·9	12·1	13·0
1982	1·0	12·4	13·4
1983	1·0	13·1	14·1
1984	1·1	13·1	14·2
1985	1·1	12·5	13·6
1986	1·3	11·9	13·2

Figures for 1987 are not yet available.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any figures giving a breakdown by nationality of tourists visiting Scotland.

Mr. Lang: Estimates for visitors to Scotland from overseas in 1986 by country of origin are as follows:

	Thousands	*Percentage*
United States	336	28·9
Canada	111	9·5
Total North America	447	38·4
France	100	8·6
West Germany	141	12·1
Italy	37	3·2
Belgium-Luxembourg	16	1·4
Netherlands	35	3·0
Denmark	6	0·6
Greece	5	0·4
Spain	17	1·5
Portugal	6	0·5
Total EC (excluding Irish Republic)	363	31·3
Iceland	7	0·6
Austria	15	1·3
Norway	28	2·4
Sweden	27	2·3
Switzerland	15	1·3
Other Western Europe	7	0·6
Total Non EC Western Europe	99	8·5
New Zealand	19	1·6
Japan	12	1·0
Saudi Arabia	13	1·1
South Africa	15	1·3
Australia	96	8·3
Other Rest of World (all less than 10,000)	99	8·5
Total Rest of World	254	21·8

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what efforts are being made by the Government to progress Scottish tourism.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) on 24 February at column *233*.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the contribution to the Scottish economy by the tourist industry.

Mr. Lang: It is estimated by the Scottish tourist board that visitor spending in Scotland in 1986 was about £1,600 million. On this basis, tourism is estimated to contribute 5 per cent. to Scottish GDP.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has about the levels of wages and salary being paid in the Scottish tourist industry.

Mr. Lang: Tourism is a diverse industry covering a wide range of occupations. The only information on wages and salaries available to me is that contained in the new earnings survey 1987. Copies of the survey are available in the Library.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a regional breakdown within Scotland of the number of tourists coming to Scotland for holidays.

Mr. Lang: The regional breakdown of visitor trips taken in Scotland in 1986 was as follows:

	[1]*Overseas trips* *thousands*	[1]*United Kingdom domestic trips* *thousands*
Highlands and Islands	295	2,100
Grampian	125	1,700
Tayside	105	1,200
Strathclyde	430	3,800
Central	50	700
Fife	60	800
Lothian	600	2,300
Dumfries and Galloway	50	650
Borders	30	450
Unspecified	20	—

[1] Figures include multiple trips to regions within Scotland taken as part of one trip to Scotland.

Timber

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 31 March, *Official Report*, column *361*, if he will state the number of persons employed in *(a)* sawmilling, planing and so on of wood, *(b)* manufacture of semi-finished wood products and further treatment and processing of wood and *(c)* pulp, paper and board, in Scotland, England and Wales, respectively.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is in the table.

	Employment		
	Scotland	*England*	*Wales*
Sawmilling, planing etc of wood	4,400	18,200	[1]—
Manufacture of semi-finished wood products and further processing and treatment of wood	500	3,900	[1]—
Pulp, paper and board	5,700	24,300	[1]—

[1] Figures cannot be given without disclosing information relating to individual firms.

Source: Annual Census of Production, 1985.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 31 March, *Official Report*, column *361* to what factors he attributes the difference between the figure quoted of 10,600 people employed in Scotland in the pulp, paper and timber industries in 1985, and that of 2,600 employed in the wood processing industries in Scotland, quoted by the Forestry Commission in its publication "Forestry Facts and Figures 1985-86".

Mr. Lang: The figure of 10,600 is drawn from survey information obtained in the annual census of production and includes all employees in plants classified to the pulp, paper and timber industries in Scotland in 1985. The figure of 2,600, quoted by the Forestry Commission, is an estimate of those employees engaged in plants reliant on Scottish grown wood. Thus, for example, if paper mills in Scotland used imported raw materials or recycled waste paper in 1985, their employment is excluded from the Commission's figure, as is employment in plants which may have used a mix of home-grown and imported raw materials.

Foreign Travel

Mr. Tony Banks To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the total costs incurred by his

Department on foreign travel during the financial year 1987-88 identified by *(a)* ministerial travel and *(b)* travel abroad by civil servants.

Mr. Rifkind: In 1987-88 foreign travel expenditure in my Department amounted to:

	£
Ministers	19,759
Civil Servants	160,090
Total	179,849

TRANSPORT

Motorways (Repair and Maintenance)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what instructions his Department gives to deter those working on the repair or maintenance of the United Kingdom motorway system from running across the motorway lanes in front of oncoming traffic; whether he is satisfied that those instructions are adequately enforced; and whether he has received any representations on this subject.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 the health, safety and welfare at work of employees and their supervision is the responsibility of each employer. In addition, it is the duty of every employee while at work to take care for the safety of himself and others.

Enforcement of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act is the responsibility of the Health and Safety Executive.

Advice on this subject in relation to trunk roads and motorways is given in a departmental advice note TA 2/79 and in a joint report published in 1985 by the Department and the County Surveyors' Society. A copy of each has been placed in the Library.

We have also received a letter on this subject.

Road Accidents

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the *(a)* projected and *(b)* recorded numbers of road fatalities and casualties in the United Kingdom for 1987; and what equivalent information he has about other EEC countries.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No projections are made of casualties in road accidents. Final data for 1987 are expected to be available by July. The number of people killed in road accidents in the United Kingdom in 1987 is provisionally estimated to be 5,300, with total casualties at 318,000.

Road accident casualty data for other European Community countries for 1987 are not yet available. The relevant data for 1986 are shown in the table:

European Community comparisons of road casualties: 1986

	[1]*Killed*	[2]*Injured*	*Total*
United Kingdom	5,618	325,275	330,893
Belgium	1,951	79,861	81,812
Denmark[3]	771	13,809	14,580
Federal Republic of Germany	8,948	443,217	452,165
France	11,947	258,029	269,976
Greece	1,625	27,328	28,953
Irish Republic	389	8,327	8,716
Italy[3]	7,629	217,603	225,232
Luxembourg	79	1,904	1,983
Netherlands	1,529	50,081	51,610
Portugal[3]	2,460	38,888	41,348
Spain	7,045	135,519	142,564

[1] In accordance with the commonly agreed international definition, most countries define a fatality as being due to a road accident if death occurs within 30 days of the accident. The official road accident statistics of some countries, however, limit the fatalities to those occurring within shorter periods after the accident. Deaths in the above table have been adjusted according to the factors used by the Economic Commission for Europe and the European Conference of Ministers of Transport, to represent standardised 30-day deaths. Those countries with adjusted fatality data are: Spain, France, Greece, Italy and Portugal.

[2] Because of differences in the definition and the quality of collection in different countries, injury statistics are not as reliable an indicator of road safety trends as death statistics.

[3] 1985 data.

Motorway Accidents

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents were reported on British motorways during *(a)* 1985, *(b)* 1986 and *(c)* 1987 which were caused by loose items, debris or loads shed from goods vehicles.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Stats 19 road accident reporting system does not collect data on the causes of road accidents. While accidents are recorded that involved a dislodged vehicle load, the system does not identify the type of vehicle from which the load was dislodged, or whether it was, itself, involved in the accident.

Data for 1987 are not yet available. However, the number of accidents on motorways in Great Britain which involved a dislodged vehicle load in the carriageway, are given in the table.

	1985	*1986*
Fatal	2	1
Serious	8	4
Slight	25	30
Total	35	35

Aircraft (Deicing)

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many incidents of blocks of ice falling from aircraft were reported in each year from 1983 to 1987.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I understand from the Civil Aviation Authority that the number of reported incidents in the United Kingdom was as follows:

	Number
1983	15
1984	27
1985	15
1986	22
1987	18

A47(T)

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the latest traffic flow figures on the A47(T) road in Cambridgeshire *(a)* in total, and *(b)* or different

categories of vehicle, as available; and at what level of traffic flow the provision of a dual carriageway would be considered by his Department.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In 1987 the average annual daily flow ranged from 8,000 to 38,000 vehicles. A detailed analysis by vehicle type for the whole route is not available. The proportion of HGV's ranged from 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. Departmental standards require that dual carriageways should be considered as one of the options for a road scheme when traffic flows are forecast to exceed 11,000 vehicles per day 15 years after the road is expected to open. The standard finally selected will also have regard to economic justification and environmental impact.

Vehicle Flows

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the trunk roads and motorways completed in the last 10 years where average daily vehicle flows are respectively below and above his Department's forecasts made at the time of authorisation.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department has systematically monitored the accuracy of forecasts for trunk road (including trunk motorway) schemes for which orders were published in 1981 or later. Of 47 road schemes which have been open to traffic for more than 12 months, and for which counts of actual traffic have been compared with the forecast for that year, more than half were within 20 per cent. of the forecast. Errors below that level are statistically not significant because of the errors inherent in translating a count of one day's traffic into an annual figure. Only 5 per cent. of schemes had differences greater than 40 per cent. between the forecast and actual traffic counts. In all these cases traffic had been substantially overestimated on assumption about events which subsequently took a different course. The smaller errors were in both directions and there is no evidence of any systematic error in the forecasting methods used.

Air Traffic Control

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the number of breakdowns in air traffic control computers over the last 12 months; and what were the numbers in the previous 12 months.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The CAA is wholly responsible for all aspects of aviation safety regulation and (with the Ministry of Defence) for the provision and operation of air traffic services in the United Kingdom. The authority says that the number of failures in its two main air traffic control computer systems in the last 12 months and the previous 12 months were as follows:

	LATCC[1]		*ScOATCC*[2]	
	1988-1987	*1987-1986*	*1988-1987*	[3]*1987-1986*
Hardware failures	2	1	2	—
Software failures	5	4	21	—
Power supply failures	0	4	—	—
Total[4,5]	7	9	23	—

[1] London Air Traffic Control Centre.
[2] Scottish and Oceanic Air Traffic Control Centre.
[3] Scottish computer system became operational April 1987.
[4] Failures which resulted in ATC Flight Plan Processing Systems reverting to manual operation.
[5] LATCC total represents 0·16 per cent. of the time for 1988-87 and 0·17 per cent. for 1987-86. ScOATCC total represents 1·73 per cent. of the time for 1988-87.

A21 (Pembury Bypass)

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the contractual opening date and expected actual opening date for the A21 Pembury bypass.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The contractual completion date is 23 May. The contractor expects the bypass to be ready for use on 6 May.

Foreign Travel

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will state the total costs incurred by his Department on foreign travel during the financial year 1987-88, identified by *(a)* ministerial travel and *(b)* travel abroad by civil servants.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The latest estimate of expenditure by the Department on foreign travel during 1987-88 is:

	£
(a) Ministers	50,700
(b) Civil Servants	1,236,556

The figures include the cost of subsistence which is not recorded separately.

ENVIRONMENT

Michael Forsyth Associates

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all contacts by *(a)* Ministers in his Department and *(b)* civil servants in his Department with representatives of Michael Forsyth Associates, Michael Forsyth Ltd. and subsidiaries thereof, in each of the past five years.

Mr. Ridley: I am not aware of any official contracts with these firms in the last five years. I am however, grateful to two Ministers in my Department for having addressed conferences organised by Political Relations, a subsidiary of Michael Forsyth Associates.

Joint Boards

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each joint board their precepts for 1987-88 and 1988-89 and the percentage change between the two years.

Mr. Chope: The table gives the available information for each joint board:

Joint board precepts 1987-88 to 1988-89

	Precept 1987-88 (p)	*Precept 1988-89 (p)*	*Percentage change*
Greater Manchester PA	15·65	15·38	−1·7
Merseyside PA	22·64	19·30	−14·8
South Yorkshire PA	16·00	15·59	−2·6
Northumbria PA	14·20	14·40	1·4
West Midlands PA	12·32	14·11	14·5
West Yorkshire PA	18·20	15·72	−13·6
London Fire Authority	8·07	8·07	0·0
Greater Manchester Fire	9·75	10·45	7·2
Merseyside Fire	6·80	8·39	23·4
South Yorkshire Fire	10·26	11·21	9·3
Tyne and Wear Fire	10·54	11·04	4·7
West Midlands Fire	6·62	7·48	13·0
West Yorkshire Fire	11·59	13·41	15·7
Greater Manchester PTA	12·96	15·58	20·2
Merseyside PTA	28·48	26·50	−7·0
South Yorkshire PTA	34·28	30·35	−11·5
Tyne and Wear PTA	14·51	9·58	−34·0
West Midlands PTA	7·81	10·31	32·0
West Yorkshire PTA	23·78	24·82	4·4

Housing Co-operatives (Islington)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state the reasons for his refusal of the application made by Islington borough council 1986 under the Housing and Planning Act 1986, for financial assistance for the appointment of two housing co-operative development officers to assist the establishment of housing co-operatives in the borough.

Mrs. Roe: The guidelines issued by my Department for housing management grant under section 16 of the Housing and Planning Act 1986 indicate that grant will not normally be available towards expenditure which could be funded by local authority main programmes. As the application from Islington borough council was in support of two development officers in its own co-ops section, approval was not given. Our priority is to support non-statutory organisations offering advice to tenants groups.

Football League Chairmen

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last attended a meeting of the 92 Football League club chairmen; what issues were discussed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: I have not attended a meeting of the 92 Football League chairmen. I hold regular meetings with the president of the league and other football authorities at which measures to combat hooliganism are reviewed.

Local Authority Charging

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he now proposes to give effect to his intention, announced in his statement of 24 July 1987, *Official Report*, column 275, to permit the introduction of new local authority charging.

Mr. Chope: It has become clear that it will not be possible to add the necessary provisions to the Local Government Finance Bill, now before Parliament. It remains our intention to introduce such a power at the next appropriate legislative opportunity.

Housing Action Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will name the first housing action trusts to be set up; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Roe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland) on 16 March 1988 at column *598*.

Foreign Travel

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state the total costs incurred by his Department on foreign travel during the financial year 1987-88, identified by *(a)* ministerial travel and *(b)* travel abroad by civil servants.

Mr. Ridley: Total costs incurred by my Department on foreign travel are no longer monitored separately from United Kingdom travel.

London Residuary Body (House Sales)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the price received by the London residuary body for the seaside and country houses sold to North British Housing Association.

Mr. Chope: £20·2 million.

No. 10 Downing Street

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of 14 April, *Official Report*, column 232, if he will give a breakdown of the expenditure on *(a)* furnishings and *(b)* decoration at No. 10 Downing street in 1987-88, for all items of over £500.

Mr. Chope: Up to 31 March 1988 expenditure in 1987-88 on furnishings and decorations at No. 10 Downing street for all items over £500 was as follows:

	£
(a) Furnishings	
Glass-fronted bookcase	500·16
Re-upholstery	727·85
Re-covering settee	731·99
Berber carpet	560·44
(b) Decorations	
Internal decorations	2,300
Internal decorations	4,133·07

Oval Cricket Ground

Mr. David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last discussed the future of the Oval with representatives of Surrey county cricket club.

Mr. Moynihan: I had a number of discussions with representatives of the club before Christmas, about the question of financing the redevelopment of the Oval. I told them that I thought that it should be possible to increase the offer of private sponsorship which they had previously received and that I would give any help that I could in this respect. I subsequently contacted a number of potential private sponsors, and related to these discussions, a substantially larger offer of sponsorship was made to the club. I understand that the club may now be on the point of agreeing an arrangement with the company concerned along the lines I discussed with the company. I am glad that I was able to help in these discussions and I am grateful for the helpful role which my hon. Friend himself played. I wish the club and the sponsors well.

Housing Subsidy (London)

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the housing subsidy paid to each London borough metropolitan district and non-metropolitan district in each of the years from 1978-79 to 1988-89 (estimated), expressed in constant 1988-89 prices.

Mr. Ridley *[holding answer 21 April 1988]:* I am placing in the Library the information requested for the years 1981-82 to 1988-89 inclusive. Information for the years before 1981-82, when the present housing subsidy system came into operation, cannot be provided except at undue cost.

Homelessness

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now publish the research and conclusions of the work on homelessness commissioned by his Department from the University of Birmingham's centre for urban and regional studies.

Mr. Ridley *[holding answer 21 April 1988]:* The project is not yet completed. I will keep the hon. Member in touch with developments.

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 131**

SESSION 1987–88

12th April–22nd April 1988

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Com = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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